FROM THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *RELAUNCH YOUR LIFE* AND *FAIL BIG*

SCOTT ALLAN

DO THE ~~EASY~~ HARD THINGS FIRST

How to Win Over Procrastination and **Master** the Habit of Doing Difficult Work

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What readers are saying about

Do the Hard Things First

"The author delves into how behaviour matters and provides strategies and process to take these head on to minimize or eliminate the distractions that cause delays and procrastination. From how you live your daily life to how successful you are in your chosen career, Scott Allan has included methodologies to help guide the reader down the right path."

— Bill Miller, bestselling author of Rookie CEO

“This book serves as a compilation and guide-book for anyone because each of us needs to read and take heed of the valuable and down-to-earth content succinctly presented in real-life examples. Procrastination is a very strong choice pulling persons to the side and away from more-difficult decisions-to-action. Bridge-building between present wants-and-needs and future wants-and-needs requires an understanding of creating a balance in plans for life and making key decisions.”

— Ralph Koerber, bestselling author of Road to Journey’s End

“Do you think you're lazy and that's why you get nothing done? Quote – “Your mind isn't lazy, it just needs to be disciplined with a new set of behaviour.” I love this about the author. Every book he gets down more to the nitty gritty which helps us understand how we operate and stops procrastination. He teases out for us how to work our way towards success. Every page is filled with gems."

— DTHTF Reader

“Even if you don't feel you have an issue with procrastination, you should read this book. Don't stop with reading it. Don't expect results without

action! Apply the provided strategies as you are reading the book, don’t wait until you complete the entire book.”

— NealWC, DTHTF Reader

"This is a helpful book for anyone who struggles with procrastination. The section of the book on the cost of self-sabotage was really convicting and instructive to me. I now have positive strategies to help set myself up well instead of shooting myself in the foot. I understand now that critical task avoidance is a pattern of repetition that must be broken.

— DTHTF Reader

"I always think when I get this, or do that I'll be finished and then I'll be "happy". Truth is: it never ends. I leaned early on if I wanted my kids to do something, they didn't get the reward until what they needed to do was done. (or it didn't get done.) This is so true for all of us. Great ideas in this book about "Why" we act this way, and how to stop."

— DTHTF Reader

"The "Hard Things" mentioned in the book are actually related to self-transformation and putting an individual's life on a new path - for a more joyful, fulfilling, and prosperous living. It will force the reader to think critically about what is really important and how time should be spent in the remaining days on earth. The book provides great guidance on how to translate the reflection into action." — Ken L, DTHTF Reader

“As a chronic procrastinator, I sought practical help in this book and was not disappointed. I received an advanced copy of the book but I went ahead and bought a copy because I know I will be reading it multiple times as I gradually master each of the steps. I am immediately going to begin working on closing my open loops and interrupting my impulse snaps. If you struggle

with procrastination, I highly recommend you read this book and do the Implementation Tasks.” — Mary Dunn, DTHTF Reader

“An inspiring book about how to overcome the biggest hurdle of doing anything that seems hard. Includes useful steps to follow in order to move all your hard things over, to the other side of your list, where you have the completed items. It’s useful in helping yourself, as well as others.”

— Gabriela Dura, DTHTF Reader

“I have been an avid fan of Scott’s books for a long time now and this book is a good reminder of why that is. Scott shares a lot of strategies here, which I find useful and are extremely easy to implement. Like his other books I somehow feel he understands my psych and the mind games that I play that prevent me from dealing with obstacles that are in my way to achieving my goals. His description of the invented excuses I use to avoid moving forward really hit home. He draws on his own experiences and of the people he has coached – that is the point – I feel like he is in my corner as my own personal coach. Thanks Scott! The biggest message I gleaned from reading this treasure is that all the negative self-talk is based on fear. When dealing with these demons, if you are aware of that fact and try employing some of Scott’s strategies you will be able to move forward even if at first you only take small steps pushing the fear and anxiety aside.”— Frank William Angus, DTHTF Reader

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Do the Easy Hard Things First.

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Do the

Hard Things First.

How to Win Over Procrastination and Master the Habit of Doing Difficult Work

Scott Allan

ScotAllan
INTERNATIONAL
SA

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Do the Hard Things First: How to Win Overcome Procrastination and Master the Habit of Doing Difficult Work

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Procrastination is the fear of success. People procrastinate because they are afraid of the success that they know will result if they move ahead now. Because success is heavy, carries a responsibility with it, it is much easier to procrastinate and live on the ‘someday I’ll’ philosophy.

— Denis Waitley

Introduction: Why We Do Hard Things Last

"Amateurs sit and wait for inspiration, the rest of us just get up and go to work.

— Stephen King

Are you living in chaos because you constantly put off critical tasks until the last minute? Do you feel disorganized both at home and at work? Do you experience feelings of guilt, anxiety, frustration, and a degree of hopelessness with all your incomplete projects?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, you could be trapped in the storm of chronic procrastination. This condition has created a space of chaos in your mind, your life, and your work.

As a procrastinator, your systems and level of organization appear unmanageable on many levels. No matter how many times you've promised to "do that thing you keep forgetting to do," it just gets shoveled aside for work that is less meaningful, easier, or more fun.

If you suffer from habitual procrastination, everywhere you turn you'll be surrounded by clutter in your room, closets, and office area. You know that you should do something about it, but when you try to move forward, you are consumed with overwhelm.

This habit of avoiding hard tasks has become so natural to you that you feel trapped in its vices. Like an addict that struggles to break free of addiction, you struggle to do what matters most first.

If a task has to be completed but it isn't enjoyable, you make excuses to explain why you can't do it:

"I'm too busy right now" or "Someone else will do it if I don't."

As a result, your tasks and projects labeled as "later" wind up on the top shelf of your "never" to do list.

Every time you are reminded of the things you still have to do, yet another orchestrated distraction pulls you away from the task. This cycles into a strong habit of postponing difficult work. As with most rituals, practicing procrastination consistently over the years has made is a concrete habit in your life. You want to say NO, but struggle to resist the temptation to become distracted. You're quickly pulled into another direction without your realizing it's happening again.

As with any habit in life, it begins with a string of consistent actions practiced every day, until eventually, these habits form into an unbreakable chain, and become extremely hard to diffuse years later.

You default to easy or fun tasks and convince yourself that you are being productive. Although you know what you should be doing, you just don't know how to move forward.

In a state of constant immobility, you remain mentally paralyzed by overwhelm and a feeling of helplessness.

If this describes your situation, you're in the right place. I'm here to help you. With my system in Do the Hard Things First, we will turn your ongoing self-sabotaging situation around.

There is no tomorrow if there is time today. If procrastination—the habit of putting off things that require immediate attention—is having a negative impact on your life, this book will show you how to triumph over the habit and win your life back one small victory at a time.

It's Time for a Change. It's time to start winning instead of losing to the battle that has consumed your life—the battle against procrastination.

What is Procrastination?

According to researchers, procrastination is defined in the psychological literature as the practice of putting off impending tasks to a later time, even when such practice results in "counter-productive and needless delay."

It is the act of delaying work that you know needs to be done… but you choose not to do it in favor of an activity you enjoy. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Besides, we all have the right to act lazy or favor watching TV over cleaning the living room. But procrastination becomes a problematic habit when the damage incurred is extended over a long term, often branching into decades.

Procrastinating on decluttering your room will not ruin your life…but failing to organize your finances and having to work into your 70s just to pay the bills could be an undesirable situation. You fail to act now and as a result, end up paying later.

Procrastination can be further defined as the state of acting against all common sense or judgment. For many people, it's a loss of self-control or poor self-regulation. Instead of doing the work that really matters, you might fill your time with worthless activities that make you feel busy but, amounts to nothing by the end of the day.

Procrastination is a form of self-defeat and self-sabotage. When out of control, it can create chaos and irreparable damage in your life.

The primary driving force behind procrastination is the prioritization of short-term mood repair and emotion regulation over long-term achievement and wellbeing.

This means that, when procrastinators are averse to a task they don't want to do, they will delay taking any form of action in order to escape the suffering from negative emotions in the present.

Who Am I? (and Why I Procrastinate)

First, I'm not a professional psychotherapist and I don't have a degree or a Doctorate in Psychology (PsyD). What I do have are fifty years of life on planet Earth, and a lot of experiences to share with you that can help you build the greatest version of YOU. But before we get into that, what I can bring to the table is a lifetime battle with one of the most underrated self-defeating habits there is: Procrastination!

I love the subject of procrastination for the absolute transparency it has shown me in how I relate to the world. I've thought about this topic a lot, read many books, have taken programs (that I never finished) and immersed myself in some great online blog content (check out Tim Urban at https://waitbutwhy.com/) and, having fumbled and failed through my life,

still turned out with a pretty good life living in Japan as a full-time author and online educator for personal development.

But all that aside, I struggle to this day with my own demons that want to multi-task, create massive to-do-lists, organize sock drawers, and learn HTML coding while watching YouTube videos. If you can relate to this, you're in the right place!

Although I have managed to push through my own struggles and published 15 books to date, so when people say to me, "wow, you've written so many books!" my first response is, "Yes, and I procrastinated on writing every one of them."

I'm excited to share this latest adventure with you as I dive into the best strategies (and a system) that have worked for me over the years. I managed to turn fear into action, and chronic procrastination into… well, less procrastination than I practiced before. My goal is to teach you how to fail less by learning through the failures I've made.

With all this said, let's dive deeper into this mess and build something together that will stand the test of time…

Present vs. Future Rewards

There are many reasons we procrastinate, but the scope of this material is going to provide you with a formula and a system to reduce and control the behavior of delaying.

We will cover a list of reasons for procrastination soon, but the most prevalent reason I have experienced is the brain's relationship to immediate vs. future gratification. Based on a phenomenon called time inconsistency,

according to behavioral psychology, this is the tendency of the brain to favor immediate rewards over future rewards.

Let’s look at the dynamics between your present self and future self.

When you set a goal—saving for retirement or traveling around the world—you are making plans for your future self, and future “you” values long-term rewards. So, while in the future you can set goals, only in the present moment can you take action.

When a decision must be made what action to take now, researchers discovered that, while the future YOU really wants a long-term dream to come true, present you favors instant gratification, and would rather watch TV instead of working out, or eat sugar-filled snacks instead of a salad.

When a goal such as “traveling the world” someday is in the distant future, procrastination makes sense. If it isn’t happening now, I can continue to dream about it. But the future is rolling up fast, and what we discover is that goal we set for ourselves ten years ago is now only five years away, and then one year away. So, what happens? We extend the timeline. You tell yourself, “I’ll just go after the kids are older” or, “When I finally get around to getting the money together.”

But that never happens. We talk about it but take little action in the present moment to make it a reality in the future.

It becomes a continuous loop of planning, extending the deadline, planning again, extending again. When goals lack urgency, it opens the door for procrastinating indefinitely. When you wake up and you’re forty years old, and all the plans you made in your 20s are out of reach, you realize that while you were busy making more plans and talking about it, the years rolled over you.

There is a large gap between the time when we complete a task and the time at which we will receive the reward for completing. This distance between the present now and your goal can cause you to discount the value of this reward, which means that the motivational value of the goal will be reduced. It's like a tiny speck on the ocean that appears miles away, and you can barely make out what it is. You don't pay attention to it until you get closer and see that it's a massive tanker… coming right at you!

I don't want this to happen to you, so defeating the procrastination habit is going to save your life. You deserve to live your dreams today, and that means working now to reap the rewards later. But you can still enjoy the small rewards along the way. I believe that the journey is the reward, and the result is the accumulation of all the work you put in on a daily and weekly basis. When you insert balance into your daily life, you are able to enjoy today while assuring your long-distance plan will be fruitful.

Imagine where you want to be in ten years, and the steps you must take today to get there. We're talking about small steps, baby steps, but taking action no matter what. Understanding—what James Clear refers to as—the present you and the future you relationship, is one key to getting started on breaking down this self-defeating behavior.

What You Need to Succeed

As with anything that requires a change in behavior, the best thing you can do is show up every day with a clean slate. This means wiping away past guilt for all the days you've lost because of procrastination, and leaning into self-forgiveness.

Yes, right now—before we go any further—stop what you're doing, close your eyes and say, "I forgive you (your name). Now let's do this!" In fact,

this should be the first thing you do at the start of each day.

You need a mindset that is open to learning. You will fail and stumble, and there will be days when self-doubt hijacks your confidence.

When you think about giving up and going back to the way things used to be (your comfort zone), I want you to visualize the consequences of this decision. Bring your mind back to the present moment and the journey. The comfort zone is a place for old behaviors and a shipyard of bad habits that constantly fail us. My goal is to take you out of your comfort zone—even for just a short time—to show you greater possibilities that exist.

The greatest ideal you can bring to the table is your determination. This is how you will push through anything that gets in your way. You will succeed by showing up to play, even if it means losing most days. You will show up to learn, even if it means working longer days.

As Tony Robbins always says, “it’s not resources we are lacking, but resourcefulness.”

When you have an attitude of unlimited resourcefulness, you will always attract the resources.

You have everything that is needed to succeed in this course, in your life, and beyond. I can give you the tools, but it’s up to you to put them to use.

This is more than just a book about overcoming procrastination or building better habits. You will do these things, but the outcome in Do the Hard Things First is about knowing why we put ourselves in these situations, and then creating a solution to heal old behavior.

"If you are not willing to risk the usual you will have to settle for the ordinary."

— Jim Rohn

What You'll Learn in Doing the Hard Things First

Benjamin Franklin once said, "Don't put off until tomorrow what you can do today."

In Do the Hard Things First, I will teach you my practical system I have developed and used to recover from a debilitating habit of chronic procrastination spanning over three decades.

I've done a lot of procrastinating in my life, and while I relied heavily on the practice to cope with reality, I recognized the harm it had caused, and would continue to cause, if I didn't take definitive action and replace this bad habit with a set of healthy behaviors.

Procrastination (which I refer to as task avoidance addiction) reduces your energy when all the incomplete tasks pile up in your head. In a mad shuffle to finish tasks at the last minute, you end up failing to do anything worthy of quality. Remember, if a thing is worth doing, it's worth doing to the best of your ability.

The habit of doing hard things last—or not at all—is a trap. The moment you fall into the trap, you make a pact with yourself to do it later, on a better day, at a more convenient time. But time slips away. Days become weeks. Weeks become months and a year passes by.

Overwhelmed and ashamed, you handle this condition by making yourself busy doing other things. When you look at all your "must-do" items on an endless checklist of never-ending tasks, you sweep everything into the corner, with every intention of "getting to it soon."

In this situation, we tend to choose the easy things first to experience a sense of getting something done, even if it isn't what should have been done first. You ask yourself, "what is the harm, as long as I'm working?" But the question is, what are you working on?

I remember working fourteen-hour days and when I reviewed the tasks completed, I didn't have one. Spending three hours a day on email is not a priority, and yet, I would find myself stuck in an inbox of endless messages because this appeared to be easy work.

The mind has been trained to do work that is easy and fun. You have strong intentions to take hard action, but feeling deflated and defeated, all your energy goes into looking busy, with little to show for it.

Most of our incomplete tasks and projects remain there, rotting away as we plunge ahead, looking busy to the outside world, but getting little accomplished.

Meanwhile…

The list is as endless as are the excuses.

Why do we avoid doing hard things?

There are many reasons, and no good excuses. But be honest with yourself. This isn't who you want to be. You hate putting things off. You want to be more dependable. You want to work hard and succeed. You want to enjoy helping other people succeed. You want to be organized and feel great about yourself without suffering the shame and guilt of this self-sabotaging task avoidance habit.

You love challenges and can handle anything. That is why you made this decision to be here, to learn a process and systematic set of strategies that can turn it all around.

You are capable of greatness, and I'll show you that your procrastination habit is nothing more than a behavior you have mastered. The key to reversing this habit is to practice and implement a new set of behaviors. I'll help you develop a new identity. I'll show you a novel approach to making your hard things a priority instead of a "later" task.

As you will learn in this book, by doing the hard things first, you will gain a new sense of joy and freedom that you have never experienced before. You will reduce and eliminate anxiety caused by procrastinating, and like myself, most of my anxiety stemmed from this behavior.

These are big claims, but I speak from experience. As a helpless procrastinator for over thirty years, when I began doing hard things that used to overwhelm me, my life opened up in so many new ways. Challenges I used to avoid, I now enjoyed taking part in. Work I used to throw under the bed and forget about now ended up on my priority list each morning.

I know this freedom exists, and I know that you can also have this freedom if you really want it.

IF You really want it.

I state this with emphasis because I know change is challenging, but the rewards are life changing. You deserve the best, and I don't want you to short change yourself anymore.

Remember: Procrastination—or bad habits of any nature—is not a trait you're born with. Just like any other ritual, you learned this habit through years of conditioning.

You can unlearn this habit, too.

And you will. I believe in you, and working through the lessons presented in this book, you will become supercharged with confidence as you create joy in everything that awaits.

Fear lies at the center of procrastination: the fear of success, responsibility, the unknown, and decision making. In the next section, I will cover these fears in greater detail.

Take direct control of your fear today, and you are taking intentional action towards your goals. This becomes the fundamental change for building the foundations for a great future.

In Do the Hard Things First, you will learn specific strategies to:

In this course, you'll learn my structure for managing your day-to-day schedule, and the importance of why you must adopt the mindset of "Pay Now and Play Later."

You will recognize the pattern of your own self-sabotaging habits. You will kill your excuses when they materialize in your mind. You will restructure your destructive habit of task avoidance and become the best version of yourself, even if you don't know what that is yet.

Together, we will figure out what is best for your life plan moving forward, and integrate behavior change one step at a time.

The system laid out in this book is structured to save you time, increase your mental energy, and teach you to think from a place of confidence instead of fear. You'll learn how to focus in on your #1 tasks for the day, eliminate overwhelm, and become the best version of yourself in all areas of your life. You will learn to rewire your brain to complete the tasks that scare you.

I will introduce you to a framework for building an action-focused system to use for the rest of your life. You will develop an action plan and a personal program for defeating procrastination on a day-to-day basis.

Content Breakdown: How to Implement Do the Hard Things First

To avoid unnecessary confusion and set you up for success, I have deliberately made the lessons in this book easy to follow. If procrastination behavior has always been a struggle, this is where the struggle ends and winning begins. For this book to help you, it requires your commitment to follow through and practice all the strategies as they are laid out.

Here is a simple breakdown of the four parts in DTHTF:

Part 1: Understanding Your Fear

I will talk about the five fears associated with task avoidance. You will identify with the greatest fear holding you back, and over the weeks and months to come, chop away at this fear until free. We all have fears that impede progress, but to address these issues, you must know where the problem originates.

In addition, you will learn to identify excuses that become roadblocks to taking purposeful action.

Part II: Practical Steps for Doing Hard Things.

This is the “meat of the system” and comprises twenty-two strategies for procrastination recovery. You can read through these steps in just a couple of hours and be on your way to taking direct action. I explain the importance of each step and how to integrate them into your daily flow. My advice is to focus on one step at a time, and then integrate (stack) the strategies as you make progress.

Part III: Breaking Big Obstacles.

This section takes you through the three core areas where you can apply the strategies. These are the big obstacles that can hold you back. As you work through the system for breaking procrastination, you will create a natural synergy for recovery. Taking action always defeats any form of negative conditioning. In Breaking Big Obstacles, you will learn how to:

Break Your Negative Conditioning

Eliminate Anxiety and Overwhelm

Crush Your Limiting Self-Talk

Part IV: Scale Up Five Key Areas. In this part, I give you strategies for managing five key areas of your life. Learn how to do hard things to improve your:

Health

Around home

Workspaces

Personal finance

Personal relationships

All the strategies are straight to the point. By using them, you'll learn what you need to do to take specific action that generates results.

This system works if you're a business owner/entrepreneur, a stay-at-home parent, a student, or a digital nomad living the freedom lifestyle.

The reason is that procrastination is an issue we all deal with. From high performance strategists to young adults, the need to delay work we don't want to do is a "human" element. Everyone loves to be lazy and take it easy, and there is nothing wrong with that. My goal with this book isn't to turn you into an "efficiency machine," but rather, help you break through obstacles holding you back so that you can take your life to the next level.

The time has come for you to overcome this negative, self-destructive habit. Life is too short to waste the little time you have.

I believe that together, we can make a difference.

Let's dive deeper into part 1!

Part I: Breaking Fear, Minimizing Excuses, and the Science of Delaying Gratification

“We lead our lives so poorly because we arrive in the present always unprepared, incapable, and too distracted for everything.”

— Rainer Maria Rilke

Coping Mechanisms and Procrastination

“Procrastination is not Laziness,” I tell him. “It is fear. Call it by its right name

and forgive yourself.

— Julia Cameron

Do the Hard Things First is designed to help you develop a system for dealing with and winning over procrastination. This is a complex issue, but it doesn’t have to be complicated. If you can identify the coping strategies that you favor when the procrastination habit is triggered, this gives you an edge over old behavior.

A coping mechanism is an internal manipulative function that we have programmed to give us permission for acting out without restraint.

Knowing how you delay important tasks leads you towards better strategies to combat the problem. The question to ask yourself is, “how will I respond the next time I catch myself putting something off?” Knowing how the pattern begins is a key observation to turning it around.

There are probably various strategies that you have used to deal with procrastination. Coping mechanisms reduce stress, anxiety, fear, guilt, and shame. They work to the degree that they regulate our negative emotions surrounding task avoidance by minimizing the emotional effect of procrastination.

In the short term, coping mechanisms carry you through the storm. But eventually, the storm returns some day and the long- term damage becomes apparent. For example, you delay saving money in the short term, but decades later, you are still working because you have saved nothing.

You delay eating healthier now because you want just one more donut, and five years later you have diabetes.

Coping mechanisms favor the present you to the future you. But as you grow self-aware of the triggers that cause you to delay, you can implement changes to your environment and change routines to begin with. Later we will target the specific strategies for reacting to triggers.

As you read this list and recognize your own particular coping mechanism, it raises your level of self-awareness. A red flag will appear when you lean into your procrastination tendency.

Read through this list and identify the top three mechanisms that apply to you. Give it a rating from 1 to 10 of how strong your tendency is to tap into this mechanism when the urge to delay appears. I have included a set of solutions to help you with each coping mechanism.

Coping Mechanisms List

(1). Self-isolation. Avoiding others and avoiding letting others know how bad your procrastination is. This could involve pretending that you're able to run your own business, but in reality, your accounting books are a mess and the more imbalanced it becomes, the stronger you procrastinate on taking care of business.

Self-isolation is one of the more difficult coping mechanisms to deal with because you're very self-aware that you're procrastinating. But without effective tools to move forward, you retreat alone into a cave to hide from the shame and feelings of failure.

People who cope through isolation build walls around vulnerability to defend against their weaknesses and hope that they are not discovered as a fraud. But self-isolating only works to strengthen the weakness and eventually becomes an emotional escape point. When in fear, "run!"

Solution: Use this time to set goals for yourself. Take action pro-actively without seeking the help or support of anyone. This builds self-efficacy, a term we will discuss in more detail later. To recover from self-isolation, you must learn to: 1. Reach out when you need to; 2. Learn to be alone when you need to.

Self-isolation is used too often as self-medication. But it simply estranges you further from the truth. And showing vulnerability to people is growth.

(2). Distraction. Engaging in unrelated behaviors to distract yourself from the task that you need to complete. This could involve scrolling through worthless social media content, playing video games, or turning on TV instead of working on your project.

We will talk about distraction later, but like most people, distraction plays a role in how we work, communicate, and interact with the world. The only distraction you should concern yourself with is your own mind. That is where it begins. For example, it isn't your phone that distracts you but, your impulse to pay attention to it. First, your mind has a thought about it, and then you do it.

Solution: Make a list of the external stimuli that are distracting you. Every time you are pulled away from a task to "check" or do something else, note what it is. What thoughts did you just have to trigger this? Was it a feeling of anxiety or boredom?

Identifying your distraction zone means you can block it. Awareness is key. Knowing that this thing (a device, social media,) triggers you to react means you can say no when it happens.

(3). Comparison. Comparing your procrastination issues to someone else's problems or justifying your past behavior to downplay your current actions. This could involve saying that your procrastination is acceptable, because everyone you know procrastinates to some degree, so why am I any different.

Solution: Run your own race at your own pace. If others are delaying or procrastinating, that is there issue. When you play the comparison game and say "it's okay, because they do it too," you're setting limitations.

Your only focus should be on making yourself better today than you were yesterday. When you catch yourself in the comparison trap, your focus is on them and not on you. Shift this focus to laser in on your strategy for pushing procrastination aside and getting things done.

(4). Emotional Distancing or Minimizing. You try to create emotional distance by minimizing how much you actually care. This could involve saying that you don't care about how you'll do in the job interview, so you act "tough" or nonchalant about it.

Or you avoid asking someone out because you're afraid of rejection. Your friend asks, "How did it go?" and you say, "I decided she wasn't worth it."

Procrastination can be used as a form of avoiding situations where there is a risk of rejection or the chance of failing. Instead of trying, you blow it off and make like it's not a big deal. But beneath the surface, you feel a sense of loss.

Solution: Failure is a fear everyone struggles with. But you can overcome this by asking yourself, "How would you act if you knew you couldn't fail? What would you ask if you knew you couldn't hear "no"? Who would you approach and what would you request?"

Being told no is a good thing because it conditions us to continue asking when we are turned down. There is no such thing as a magic door that is opened for everyone at all times. Don't minimize your importance or self-worth by brushing off opportunity.

(5). Denial. Pretending that you're not actually procrastinating, by engaging in unnecessary activities instead of working on the task that you should work on. For example, this could involve calling your friends or texting people to "get motivation" from reaching out to others. You might say, "I have to call Steven before I start this thing." Your conversation with friends continues for hours and then you're out of time.

Solution: You are an intuitive human. When you put things off, even when you try to ignore it, you know this. Listen to the voice inside of you that is raising the anxiety flag.

Your anxiety is triggered when you think about doing a specific task. For example, when there is a form that I need to fill out and every time I look at it I feel anxious, that means I need to do this thing now.

Denial thrives in distraction, but it also stirs up anxious thoughts, pushing you to “do it now!” Pay attention to this feeling. Take five minutes to sit with your thoughts. That thing you’re avoiding, take five minutes to work on it.

We will cover this simple strategy in detail soon, but the five-minute rule is a game changer.

(6). Avoidance. Avoiding anything related to the task that you’re procrastinating on. For example, this could involve having twenty-seven tabs open on your computer so you can easily jump from one task to the other instead of doing the work that needs to be done. We will talk about task avoidance throughout this book and I’ll arm you with the best strategies for tackling task avoidance.

Solution: Procrastination begins with specific triggers that pull your attention away from what needs to be done. Pay attention to your thoughts. Before you become distracted, you will have a thought to “check this” or “go do that.”

Take five minutes and close your eyes. Think about the task you need to do. Visualize doing this as an every-morning or evening habit.

Stay in the moment and target your work with laser-focus. If you’re avoiding taking purposeful action, look closely at the emotion holding you back. Is it the fear of failing? Is it the fear of change? Is your comfort zone holding you back?

In Do the Hard Things First, my purpose is to teach you how to condition your mind to ignore the pull of your distracted mind. Distraction is a choice that begins with a decision by default to run after a task that has nothing to do with what really matters.

Start with present moment observation. I use a meditative technique to condition and strengthen my mind for not responding to sudden urgencies or emergencies. In my meditation, I use a form of positive self-talk where I visualize doing the action that I'm procrastinating on. Then, immediately after the meditation—that lasts about ten minutes—I take one small step towards doing the task.

(7). Valorization or Identification. Taking pride or pretending to take pride in how much you procrastinate. For example, this could involve boasting to your friends about how much you procrastinated before an exam.

You might say, "I'm such a procrastinator!" and attach yourself to the behavior as if it's something to celebrate. Externally, you make light of the fact, but internally, you're feeling like a loser and trapped in the behavior that is failing you.

Solution: You're not a procrastinator. That is a behavior, and you can change that. Later we will dive into a strategy for stripping away this false identity.

When you catch yourself saying, "I'm a procrastinator," remember that you act the part you play. If you play the role of a procrastinator, you'll continue to act this out. Replace this with, "I'm an action taker!" You will take more action and be less stuck.

(8). Making Big Plans (That Never Happen). This is also known as wishful thinking. This happens when you focus on what you wish you could accomplish, instead of on what you're accomplishing in reality. You make false promises to yourself that things will be different in the

future. This is the short term/long-term battle that everyone struggles with between your present self and future self.

For example, you talk about all the goals and big plans you are working on, so that it appears you're highly productive, a big shaker and mover. Meanwhile, when nobody is listening or looking, you fall back to watching TV or daydreaming about success while no work is being done.

You fall into a pattern of "living your dreams" without actually living your dreams. But as long as you keep telling yourself that "someday I'll get around to it," you can continue to procrastinate about doing anything to make your dreams a reality.

Solution: Focus on one goal at a time. Make it a small goal. Avoid committing to a big goal that overwhelms you. When you feel stress or pressure to succeed—and you don't—you will fall back into a habit of avoidance.

For example, if your goal is to get into great shape, start with five push-ups in the morning. Or five minutes of running. Make the goal small enough that you can get a small win quickly. The next week, take it up to ten push-ups, or ten minutes of running.

(9). Externalization. You blame your procrastination on external circumstances or causes that are out of your control. This could involve claiming that you can't start working out because the gym closed for the week. You can't clean the bathroom because you have run out of paper towel. You can't call the bank about your late mortgage payment because it's lunchtime and they must be busy with many other clients.

The list of external excuses are convincing, but there is always a way to do something. Remember: As part of your conditioning to avoid hard tasks, you

are programmed to seek the best excuses for why it can't be done. Then you look to validate your excuses with evidence. It's all geared towards putting it off until a later date when you will get to it… just not now.

Solution: External circumstances are not to blame. It's a game in your mind, and the way to beat it is to stop playing the game.

Decide right now that you will not buy into any more excuses from your mind trying to run the show.

For example: "I can't call the bank right now, but I can send an email. I can't clean the bathroom floor until I get some disinfectant, but I can wipe down the mirror and clean the tub. I can't bike into the city for exercise because my bike is broken, but I can take the bus halfway and run the rest.

Break it down to the smallest action you can take. Even if you can't complete the project or task 100%, what can you do?

(10). Self-Blame or Rumination. Criticizing yourself for your procrastination and for your inability to achieve your goals. For example, this could involve watching hours of TV and feeling guilty for being not motivated to do anything.

You are fixating on your mistakes and constantly thinking about how you procrastinate, and then guilting yourself for being so lazy. To compound the feelings of worthlessness, you begin to eat junk food and feed into your own self-loathing.

Here is one solution to break out of this pattern:

Solution: The healing journey begins with taking control of responsibility. By owning your future and stepping into a self-leadership role, self-blame drops away. You're now empowered to take charge of your own life. There is opportunity and growth in taking charge of your life.

Write down an empowering statement that positions you for being the leader you have always wanted to be.

I will cover this in the next section. Taking full ownership of your life is the first step towards recovery from procrastination addiction.

These coping strategies can apply to other areas of your life. Overall, they are set up to fail you even though it appears that you're getting away with it. Pay attention to the excuses you use when delaying something.

Are you really too busy now, or just waiting for the perfect moment that will never arrive?

The Cost of Self-Sabotage

"The really happy people are those who have broken the chains of procrastination, those who find satisfaction in doing the job at hand. They're full of eagerness, zest, productivity.

You can be, too."

— Norman Vincent Peale

Comfort, Sabotage and Escapism

Putting off doing the hard things first almost destroyed my life. Although this sounds extreme, when we avoid doing the things that cost us our health, time, money, careers and reputation, it can cause disaster.

While you have the immediate gratification of avoiding the tedious and uncomfortable task, the long-term outcome is living a life filled with fear, regret, and anxiety. The payoff has no logic, and yet, the chronic procrastinator will lean heavily into delaying hard tasks.

When you become prone to taking the easy path, you create the habit of preferring instant gratification rather than looking for long-term success. When you pay for things out of the necessity to avoid doing the hard things you don't like, I call this extreme procrastination.

So, why are hard things so difficult to do? Are you lacking motivation? Are you just lazy? Do you need to reset your priorities? Do you fear failure?

In fact, it's a combination of all the above. The obstacle is your mindset pushing up against the difficult task you are trying so hard to avoid.

By resorting to extreme procrastination, you choose comfort now over comfort later. You play now but end up paying later. Choosing escape removes the pressure to get it done now, but subconsciously you carry the burden of the uncompleted tasks around with you. This burden becomes a shackle with weights tied to self-esteem, confidence and competency, dragging you further down.

There is a heavy price to pay for living this way, and the bill is heading your way.

But it's not too late. You can shift this form of self-sabotage. When you do, freedom is yours.

Remember this: By avoiding the difficult work, you choose to do something else less important, less engaging, and chances are, less challenging. You spend more time thinking about doing it and creating excuses for why it can't be done. When you suddenly have the time for it, you get 'busy' with another task.

So, why are you thinking about it instead of doing it? Why avoid the tasks that bring positive momentum into your life and fill you with energy and enthusiasm?

It begins with the fear of danger. You avoid fire because you know it burns. You run from a predator to avoid being eaten. This same psychology is how

you feel about doing hard things, and even though you're not in danger of becoming physically burned or eaten, you're "burning your house down" through procrastination. I have seen people go bankrupt, lose their jobs, and in severe circumstances, lose friendships and ruin relationships.

Another reason is a form of self-sabotage. You don't feel good about yourself. You think you 're lacking in motivation when really, it's a fear of failure. You subconsciously believe if you try to succeed but fail, the game is up. You will let people down. The only alternative is to not do it, and by keeping it on your "to-do" list, you know it's in the background, even if it's never completed.

This is a fallacy promise. It's failure by false intention. By following this tenet, you end up tackling the easy tasks first to experience the transient euphoria of accomplishment or progress.

I understand the temptation. There is always a later. There will always be tomorrow, and when tomorrow arrives, there is another day. And another. How simple life is when you can guarantee the coming of another day to do the things you want to avoid today.

Meanwhile, the difficult things that actually make a difference take the backseat as important projects remain unfinished, important papers never filed, and broken things just stay broken.

My friend, this is a fallacy. It is the first lie we must expose when our minds convince us that doing this hard thing tomorrow is somehow better than doing it today.

It's time to get honest with who you want to become. Never think it's hopeless or that you're a special case. I've seen the worst—beginning with

myself—and I've come to experience that we all can remove old behavior, build new habits, and create change. And we can do so at will.

I mastered the art of instant gratification many years ago, during elementary school, when I struggled with studying and doing the work. I remember tossing my homework into the corner Friday night, and trying to grind it to the finish Sunday night, or Monday morning just before class.

This became my habit until eventually I stopped doing homework altogether. I know, we have all been there, and leaving your homework until the last minute isn't such a big deal.

But over the years… you turn into an average student when you could have been an outstanding student. You become a mediocre employee doing menial jobs when you could hold an executive position, making six or seven figures a year. You end up doing a job you hate because the job you really wanted is reserved for people who will do the difficult tasks to earn the promotion.

What looks like a nasty habit is really a pattern of self-defeat that sticks with you. Yes, my habit to procrastinate and do the hard tasks last wasn't isolated to elementary school. Decades later, it showed up in critical areas of my life.

Mismanaged finances, reports and applications never filed, or projects half-finished and left to complete in the last minute. Relationships that would break apart because I avoided communication, and my line of credit destroyed when I forgot to pay the bills.

The end result was high stress, insomnia, paralyzing fear, and the inability to manage life's basic tasks.

I would come up with excuses to explain why I couldn't finish things:

Your list of excuses is endless, but you've used them so many times the default to procrastinate isn't just a habit for you, it's become a way of life. You have mastered it so well that the thought of being someone different (a person who does hard things first), is reserved for people who are motivated, smarter, and real go-getters.

As you work through your hard things to do list, think about the cost of not doing the difficult tasks. Consider the various areas of your life.

Here are five key areas that may require your attention:

(1). Business and Work.

If I don't make progress on this project, I will disappoint my coworkers and manager who placed great faith and trust in me.

(2). Relationships.

If I don't have a conversation with my wife about our future, she will become disinterested and have the conversation with someone else.

(3). Health and Wellness.

If I don't lose weight and reduce my fat, I'll gain more weight, which will make me sick. If I get sick, I won't be able to work properly, I'll be less productive, lack energy and my life will become stagnant. I don't want this!

(4). Finance and Investments.

I've been working for ten years and only have $100.00 in the bank. If I don't start a savings plan today, ten years later I'll be ten years older with zero money.

(5). Personal Productivity.

If I don't clean up my files, I'll become so disorganized that I won't be able to find anything. This will lead to mental exhaustion and build anxiety in my life. This would be a terrible way to wake up every day. I don't want to pay that price!

Here is what you can do right now. Make a short list of the five key areas in your own life. These probably include a few I've already mentioned. Now, as in the examples provided, write down the price you could end up paying if you cannot take purposeful action and do the hard work without delay.

It's time for you to stop paying for procrastination!

It's easy to consider delaying difficult tasks as nothing more than a bad habit. When you look at the situation, you can see the ways you minimize priority tasks while prioritizing the non-critical ones.

Procrastination is the act or habit of putting off something to a future time. It involves delaying what needs to be done, usually because the task is unpleasant or boring—or simply because delaying is an option.

By putting something off until a later date, you fall for the illusion that you are getting away with something. However, no matter how insignificant this

appears, you will end up paying for it later when you intend to work on critical tasks that require your immediate attention… and you can't or won't be able to start.

To illustrate, here's a true story of my own attempts at self-sabotage.

Several years ago, I received a bill on one of my two credit cards. I received the bill for the new card I'd used only once. The total came to $600. Not a problem. I had the money. But because I hadn't set this card up with my bank account, it meant I had to drive across town to pay it at the bank.

That was too much effort for me, so I tossed the bill in the corner and told myself, "I'll do it Friday". By the time Friday arrived, other things had come up.

The bill stayed where I'd tossed it and a month later, the credit card company sent a reminder. This one, I also tossed to the side and said, "Yup, this week I'll do it." But I never did.

More reminders arrived. I could have tacked them on a wall, but instead, I made more excuses. I told myself I'd always paid my bills, so why was this any different? My excuses were valid. I was too busy, but had every intention to get to it later.

There was always a later when I wanted to delay something. There would be a perfect day, a better time, a more convenient day of the week. Now, I live in Japan, so everything is in Japanese. While I can read the language, in my mind I was going to play "dumb" and pretend I couldn't understand what they were asking.

Finally, the reminders stopped coming. I was relieved.

Until they sent one final warning.

I procrastinated again. I delayed taking any form of action. I pushed the task out of my mind and filled that space with more “interesting” activities that fueled instant gratification.

The last letter I received hit home. My card had been canceled. My account canceled. But also, my other card had been canceled, too. In fact, the company canceled everything after the account went to payment arrears and I had lost my credit clearance.

All because I wouldn’t drive to the other side of town to pay a bill for $600. Before this, I’d always paid my bills, never missed a mortgage payment, or had a creditor call me.

But this particular case was different. It was deliberate self-sabotage.

It could have been avoided.

I immediately felt regret. Shame. And blame. How could this happen? How could they do this to me?

With my credit now in the arrears, like the raft that drifts too far down the river to avoid the falls, disaster had actually arrived.

The damage done. I had delayed to the extent that it was out of my control.

But this wasn’t just about getting a credit card canceled. Over the years, it compounded into other difficulties. I couldn’t get any more cards, couldn’t take out a loan, and when I traveled overseas, I had to find hotels that would accept cash or use a debit card.

I had really screwed myself.

But afterwards, I continued with the same patterns. I was locked into a habit that was holding me hostage. The habit of “do it later, play now.”

I would delay the task and then deny it actually existed. I continued to put off other things, too.

For example, I put off:

These could well be listed as “hard things”, and when we put off the hard things until later, we set ourselves up for failure…later.

For many, this is more than a bad habit. It has become a crippling, self-defeating behavior which has disastrous consequences.

Habits are reversible, but to reverse the bad habits, we must realize them so we can stop practicing them. When it comes down to it, the habit of critical task avoidance is nothing more than a pattern of repetition—a pattern we must break.

Fear needs to be seen as a compass... because that feeling is telling us we’re onto something.

Introduction to Fear

For procrastination, fear has a strong undertow effect. Fear sucks you in and pulls you down. It immobilizes you and makes you powerless and fearful to take any action that could lead to failure, risk or overwhelm. All procrastination is hidden behind fear.

It’s often implied that people who procrastinate are lazy. This is far from the truth. Most habitual procrastinators I know are hardworking, smart people, who want to do their best in everything. We procrastinate out of fear because we care.

I don’t know you personally, but I’m going to guess you’re a hard worker who cares about doing their best: at work, at home, and in your personal growth. You want to maximize your value and time and move away/escape from the fear that stands between you and all your dreams.

Practicing task avoidance is the barrier to everything you have ever wanted, and you must break it down.

Doing the hard work is broken down into five core fears:

Each fear is attached to a series of excuses that give you all the reasons you need to delay action.

Your goal is to break the connection to the past identity that was grounded in fear, and free up the new version of you that desperately wants to push forward beyond the comfort of your self-imposed limitations.

When it fuels your passion to succeed, fear is a good thing, but only if you learn to control the experience. You can do this by identifying the excuses running through your mind. You must train your mind to rewrite the messages it’s feeding you.

Let’s break down each fear, one by one. This will free up your mental capacity and make room for positive reinforcement.

Fear #1: The Fear of Commitment

Fear keeps us stuck in the “do nothing and hope for the best” situation. When I’m procrastinating on a deadline, I feel like the runner in a race that is still at the start line, while everyone else has already entered the course and is racing for the finish line. I’m too afraid to lose, so I stay behind because doing nothing is better than doing something and failing.

This is where the fear of doing hard things begins. You opt for total self-defeat by making a promise with yourself that you will do it at an unspecified time in the future.

It won’t be now, but you intend to do it soon.

Someday. Later. When you feel like it.

A voice inside whispers, “You know this isn’t true.”

In other words, you don’t really intend to do it, but as long as you tell yourself it is on the to-do-list, you can believe the lie.

This is a commitment based on false intentions. The fear of committing to doing my hard thing is mired in doubt and uncertainty. “What if you need more time? What if you get halfway done and decide this isn’t for you?”

To overcome the fear of committing to doing hard things, I decided to tackle all things that created anxiety. Everything I usually avoided doing—having serious conversations with difficult people, forms I never filled out, clutter that would pile up after months of pretending it didn’t exist. As I tore apart

all these fabrications, it was like ripping into the chaos of my fearful mind, where everything was wrapped up nice and tight.

To reach the truth, I repeatedly asked myself this question:

“Why are you protecting your fear?”

I immediately went to work in my journal and brainstormed all of my thoughts. Here is what I came up with:

The answer: “I might fail at doing the work that matters.”

The truth: By putting off important tasks for my life and business, I am failing anyway.

If I had to sum up the best way to the procrastination habit, I’d refer to Seth Godin’s advice on shipping:

“Sometimes we mistakenly believe that we’re building something that takes time, but what we’re actually doing is hiding. We stall and digress and cause distractions, not because the work needs us to, but because we’re afraid to ship our work out to the world.”

Everything became clear when I took a step back and observed my work habits. All the things I was delaying were damaging my business, my life, my finances, and all the places in between. I had built the habit of delaying, so I could feed my fear of shipping.

For me, it was unbearable to arrive at this realization. But when I learned to confront my fears, and consciously saw the damage procrastination was

creating in my life, I began making room for growth. I only started growing by cutting loose of old habits and committing to the process of continuous change.

Later is the enemy of creativity and transformation.

Here are three more reasons that could hold you back from committing:

You're Waiting to Become "Motivated" Before Doing Anything.

You think you'll do it when the motivation hits you, or when you feel like it, but you can rarely trust your feelings with procrastination. Motivation comes with working, and if you can inject energy and interest into the task you're working on, it will create the inspiration you seek. The motivation you seek is hidden behind the clouds of fear, doubt, and uncertainty. Motivation is a creation, and you generate motivation by taking intentional action.

I discovered that, by getting busy, I increased my energy in the work, even when I wasn't thrilled about starting it. A lack of motivation can be caused by stress, fatigue, overeating, or negativity in your social circle or work environment, but it isn't because you are lazy. You want to succeed, and you want to do this thing, and you will as soon as you apply action to the task.

You Feel Overwhelmed at Starting the Project.

Doing something is always better than sitting and doing nothing.

When drilled down to its essence, taking action puts your brain and body into motion so you can push through difficult circumstances. Even when the action you're taking is uncertain or unrelated to the intended outcome, when it's time to get busy, find the simplest task you can do—and work on it.

To illustrate this effect, one of my business connections works in an office. On some days he feels completely overwhelmed with his schedule of meetings, emails, more meetings, time commitments, and so on. So, when he is alone and needs to find a motivational task, he makes Christmas cards—even if it's June. He figures that he will use them soon enough!

I have another friend who staples together office reports when he feels himself putting off heavy tasks. This simple action leads him into the other tasks.

You Are Focusing on Too Many Distractions. There is no shortage of distractions around the office or at home.

Worse still, it isn't the fact that distractions exist but that you actively seek them out when you want to avoid doing something. An avoidance seeker's greatest glory is to uncover a reason they can't get something done.

Now, other factors that impact you personally may be if you have ADHD or anxiety disorder. This makes distraction seem like a natural part of your routine. But if this is the case, it's all the more reason to work hard at overcoming the distraction addiction.

Despite living in extraordinarily distracting times, you are in control of your own mind. Nobody else is telling you to focus on this or that. As you will see in the coming section, taking responsibility is the first step to healing procrastination and doing the hard things first.

Fear #2: Fear of the Unknown

When was the last time you did something without worrying or overthinking the outcome?

One of the core reasons we put things off is fear of the unknown. It's perplexing to try to understand why someone would wake up early every morning, get dressed, and go to work in a job they hate. It makes no sense why you would stay in a toxic relationship or live in a town with no jobs so you take whatever you can get.

Many of our choices boil down to a deep-seated fear of the unknown. It's the mystical place that lives beyond our comfort zone. It's the place of uncertainty and change. It is everything you imagined it could be, and everything you can't imagine.

Embrace Your Fear of the Unknown

I now live in Japan but, before coming here, I had a comfortable life in my hometown of Canada. I had no reason to leave. I could have stayed there forever, enjoying the quiet life and working in the local factory.

There would have been nothing wrong with that, of course. However, with a relationship that was moving closer towards marriage, one day, I decided to leave. Something had always pushed me to explore more of what was out there, and I knew that to find what that was, I'd have to leave.

I made the decision to do just that, and six months later, I boarded a plane bound for the Far East. I couldn't speak the language, could barely hold

chopsticks, and I was flying to an Asian country to experience something that most people would never see.

After arriving, I set myself up with a job and, although many people believed I'd lost my mind, something inside told me I was living a dream. I had crushed the fear of the unknown, and I welcomed each day with anticipation. I often wondered what I would have missed if I had never made the leap.

The fear of the unknown will always be an obstacle if you try to predict the outcome of an action. It's easy to predict the known. But the unknown is the other side of this fear.

Now, you don't have to move to the other side of the world, but what are you putting off deciding that could change everything?

Here is an actual story to illustrate what I mean.

My friend Debbie had been in a terrible relationship for several years. It was abusive, both emotionally and physically. When her friends asked, "Why don't you leave?" she would reply, "And go where? Who would want me? At least in this relationship I know where I stand."

Debbie was held back by the fear of what would happen after she left her abusive partner. To her, the consequences were terrifying.

Eventually, Debbie left that relationship, and sure enough, after months of improving her self-esteem, she met someone else and completely changed her life. But it never would have happened if she had stayed put. You can't accurately predict the outcome of an action.

When the mind locks into the worst-case scenario, it becomes your future reality. You create your future based on the predictability of your past.

As the saying goes, “If you continue to do the things you’ve always done, you will only get what you’ve always got.”

What happens when that thing you’ve been putting off suddenly demands your attention? Will you ignore it, or do what must be done?

As you consider this question, ask yourself:

“What are the consequences if I do nothing? What opportunity could I be throwing away?”

By not doing it, you are not getting away with anything. In the short term, it might appear that way, but this is an illusion. It’s a lie that you tell yourself.

Ask yourself:

What are the consequences of not looking for a new job?

What will I lose by staying in the same place doing the same thing, surrounded by the same negative environment?

You must visualize the life you want to lead, and not what is expected of you. You can change your life, but only if you take charge and lead the way. Nobody will step in and do what is best for you. The unknown is waiting for you to jump in and discover all you can be. But you must trust yourself and start your journey.

Although I have always struggled against procrastination, the best decisions I made always came about when I trusted my gut. I couldn't always explain why I had to do something, but if it comes down to living a predictable lifestyle, or exploring the depths of my own potential, I'll always take the latter.

The unknown is on the other side of this fear. Break through it by making what you really want clear. If you want to try something new but you're afraid to do it because of harsh criticism or "nobody has ever done this before", that is precisely why you should do it. But only if your gut instinct is guiding you. Tap into this energy and believe in the direction it wants to take you.

One of my regular practices is to sit down and imagine where I intend to be in twenty years. I visualize the life I am living because I jumped into the unknown and lived an uncommon lifestyle.

What about you? Where will you be if you jump into the unknown? Conversely, where will you be if you don't live in the unknown?

Fear #3: The Fear of Discomfort.

If there is one reason procrastination and avoiding difficult things is so prominent in our lives, it is:

The obsession to avoid discomfort.

If you can beat this obstacle, this frame of mind, you are taking the battle with procrastination to the front-lines. To do this, you must train your mind to lean hard toward discomfort.

If procrastination is a habit, it's because you are trained for living in a zone of comfort with habits that support this behavior. Why do you think so many people live in the past? Why do we continue to engage in behavior that leads us towards failure?

Taking the leap from comfort to discomfort is scary—but it is only the first step. There will be many more challenges on the way, but as you push forward, you build courage and confidence. With each step, you make gradual improvement in both old habit and behavior. Change creates discomfort, but this is temporary. Don't give up when you fail to get the result you were expecting.

Most people fail to change because they fail to change. Leaning into discomfort is accepting the reality that life is not designed to be easy. If you believe it is, you're setting yourself up for a fall.

Discomfort brings fear, and we prefer to avoid fear in the same way our ancestors would retreat from danger. However, sometimes, the brave soldier would head into battle with no prompt.

By leaning hard into discomfort, everything will eventually become easier. Better yet, you will change your state of mind, and when your emotional state changes, your mindset and attitude also change. All the strategies in this book will make sense. Change isn't easy because discomfort is challenging.

Doing the Hard Thing is Uncomfortable.

Yes, it is. You have to do the work you'd rather ignore. You have to initiate the conversation with your boss about your contract. You have to call the customer who isn't happy with your service or product. When it's uncomfortable, it becomes an opportunity to grow.

Do you want to grow, or stay where you are?

If things are easy, you are accustomed to the habit or routine. Anything that lacks challenge also lacks growth. You may think you're getting off easy by taking the easy way out, but this only disempowers you.

By doing what is uncomfortable, you break the habit of procrastination and move forward with the task. Face your fears, change your gears, and dig in for hard work.

Here are five practices for leaning into your discomfort. Make them a part of your routine. Break the resistance that stands between your mind and doing what needs to be done.

We have already covered several of these strategies, but let's bring everything together here:

Reduce sedentary tasks. These are the habits that suck you in and steal your time and energy. Instead of exercising, you eat a snack or lie around watching TV.

The next time this happens, start doing the thing you are resisting. Do it for five minutes only. Or use the two-minute rule. Do it for two minutes and build a little momentum.

Start with the smallest step possible. In 97% of the cases I have seen, people will resist doing a task in their mind, but when they actually get down to taking the first small step, it suddenly becomes easier and accumulates.

You know you must write that report, but you haven't started yet. In fact, you haven't even opened the file or the template. So, do that. If it is exercise, put your training shoes on. Do a few push-ups. Do something that gets you moving.

Energy builds more energy. Do it in small doses. We have a higher risk of putting something off if we see it as a big task. Remember the mountain scenario? You can only get to the top by advancing one step at a time. You don't have to do any more than that.

Resist the urge to break focus. When working on a task, I often have the urge to stop and go chasing rabbits down a trail. This means suddenly surfing the Net, shopping on Amazon, or looking up something that has nothing to do with the task I'm performing.

This is my way of leaning back into the comfort zone. When I feel discomfort, my urge is to escape after a short period, but these days, I resist. I'll carry on for five minutes. Then, when my mind says, "You've had enough, let's take a break" I'll continue for another five minutes. Or I'll do

one more rep in my workout, or I'll resist eating that scrumptious cake for another ten minutes.

What you resist always builds a deeper level of discipline for tackling hard tasks. When you resist temptation (eating that cake instead of the apple), and lean into taking definitive action towards discomfort (that task you are avoiding), a shift in mental attitude is the result. This is how you build strong habits, day by day, one small step in front of the other.

Make a cohesive action list of all the things that make you uncomfortable. This exercise brings a level of deep awareness to what you resist on a subconscious level. It feels so natural to avoid hard things that it goes unnoticed.

Create a list of all the things that you don't enjoy doing. Earlier you made a similar list of everything you are avoiding now, but this list can take you to a deeper level. These tasks could track daily expenses, eating better foods, meditation, reading, saving money, or trying something new.

Making a list and prioritizing your action tasks increases your level of awareness as to what needs your immediate attention. Focus begins with an awareness of where to direct your energy, and when you concentrate your focus, it zeroes in on your target.

Be aware of your escape method. Just as we have triggers that pull us into bad habits and derail focus, your choice of escape method is the way you flee from discomfort. I have discussed several of these, but the greater awareness you bring to the way you escape, the stronger will be your resolve to defeat the getaway method.

Everyone has a way to procrastinate—an escape method to distract you from what you need to do—and when you know what that is, you can start turning

away from it. As a way to procrastinate, my escape mechanism was to turn on TV by default. So, I got rid of the TV.

You don’t have to go to extremes, but do whatever it takes, especially in the beginning, until you build your discomfort muscle. This is a muscle that can be built with practice and training.

Start Now. Most people fail to work on goals in life because they fail to start anything. They sit and wait or get stuck in too many details leading to overwhelm. This brings on a fear of failure and stirs up memories of things you started in the past and gave up on.

You negotiate with your mind and decide now is not the time and the excuses step in.

“I’ll wait until I’m financially stable.”

“I’ll wait until the conditions are better.”

“I’ll wait until my kids are older and I have more time.”

These excuses hold you back and prevent you from ever actually start working on your goals. As the years pass by, you forget the goals that really mattered.

If you want to start, you must begin today. If you write nothing down on the blank page, it stays blank until you put pen to paper. Write down one goal you have. It doesn’t matter if it’s a small goal. Take one small step towards this goal. What is your first immediate step?

You must start moving ahead with your goals, and this begins with one thing. You begin everything by taking that first step, no matter how easy it is. What are you waiting for? The perfect day to start, when you have more time, or the perfect day when you're feeling your best?

There is no such thing as the perfect time to take action. Many people wait for the external conditions to improve, for things to drift back to normal. You could wait for someone else to arrive and fix the problem. But ultimately, you must take charge of your destiny. There will never be a better time than today, or right now. Why wait when you can take intentional action today?

Conditions are subject to change. The best time to begin your life was yesterday.

The second-best time is right now.

No matter what your current/present conditions are—rich or broke, sad or happy, scared or feeling courageous, ready or not—we are going to begin right now.

Make your decision to stop waiting and start doing. Turn off the TV. Move into a silent area and prepare your mind for what is coming. It doesn't matter where you are in your life right now, how often you've failed, or how hopeless your situation appears. It's never too late to succeed or make tomorrow better than today, and today better than yesterday.

For years, I put off cleaning out my closets. When I looked at the stuff inside, I just closed the doors. One day I asked myself, "What is the simplest thing I can do to get started?"

I threw away one thing. The next day, I threw away another box of junk. I continued to take one thing out of the closet every day—just one. A few weeks later, I'd emptied the entire closet. By doing one thing a day that only took less than a minute, I could start and finish the task.

You can do the same thing. Don't wait. You'll regret it. Begin working on your difficult obstacle today. When you complete this goal, start working on another.

Momentum begins with the first step.

Begin with the simplest task possible. Break it down into a task that takes one minute. You can go simpler and make it a thirty-second task. Ask yourself, "What's my next immediate step?" Start as easy as possible. Make it a small habit. Make the action so easy that you can't fail.

Fear #4: The Fear of Decision-Making

Most of our procrastinating behavior is built around the excuses we tell ourselves. They are the internal lies that keep the behavior active. When you decide to delay something, the decision is based on the excuse you're selecting at that time. Every excuse damages self-esteem, lowers self-confidence and makes it easier for more excuses to move in.

The procrastination habit compounds over time. It becomes easier to avoid everything difficult. If you can break down your excuses, you will drill into the core of the monster. By piling up the excuses, you put up barriers to your progress.

Listen to the thoughts you're creating when you procrastinate. What false promises are you making to yourself? What reason do you create for not doing it today? Do you really believe that your situation is so different from everyone else? Do you believe it's too late to change?

It's never too late. Right now, you are always in the best position to change your life, behavior, habits and circumstances. However, if you continue to believe in the lies, eventually it will be too late.

You Deprioritize the Task and Make a Promise to Do It later.

This is the #1 excuse I have used for decades to delay everything and anything. I promise myself to do it later, but when later arrives, I make another promise to do it next week. Next week becomes next month, and next month becomes next year.

Pro tip: The future will not be better than today unless you make changes today. Your future reflects what you do right now. Your behavior at the moment is who you are becoming in the future.

We may delay and avoid taking action because we don't feel we have the competence to do a task or decide. We feel others will look down on us or we will upset them if we do poorly on a task. We want others to value us, so we procrastinate because we don't believe we're 'good enough' to achieve without losing face.

However, we are often our own worst critics, being overly critical of our performances and doubting our ability to get things done. Being perfect or free from error won't make others love us—acceptance comes from within."

We must break the illusion that we are winning by avoiding intentional action. In the mindset of a chronic procrastinator, you always win now (by receiving an immediate sensation of freedom and euphoria). Everyone has reasons for putting off certain tasks. Some people are great at paying their bills right away, yet they avoid setting up a savings plan.

Someone else can clean their office and it is organized and spotless, but when they go home, throw their dirty clothes in the corner and forget about it for weeks. When the laundry is touching the ceiling, then they think again about doing their clothes, but they push it back another day when a more interesting task shows up.

If the task you should tackle is challenging, doing an easier task is less risky. This creates less fear, less stress, and overall is less overwhelming. The result:

Less success.

The mind is protecting the ego from uncertainty. We don't want to feel as though we don't know what we're doing. We don't want to look stupid. We don't want to feel overwhelmed. We don't want to feel as though we're not good enough, and we certainly don't want to feel like a failure or a disappointment to our family, our peers or our community.

So, we decide to do nothing. We sit on it.

By doing so, we're protecting ourselves from shame. One self-sabotaging habit of doing this is avoiding making a logical decision about what needs to be done. The fear of decision-making leads to paralysis, which raises stress and frustration. Not deciding is still deciding—you're deciding to do nothing and leave the outcome to chance!

I have made many decisions that failed. When I say I failed, I mean that I didn't get the outcome I wanted. My expectations were not met. The risk didn't work out in my favor.

Not making a decision is the same as deciding to do something and failing at it. But what if you don't view your decision as a failure, but something you attempted to do in the face of fear? What kind of world would we live in where every decision we made is a guaranteed winner?

It's not the decision you fear, but the results it brings. If you decide to pay later and do nothing now, this could increase your level of uneasiness towards doing this thing.

Remember, we are dealing with two versions of YOU:

The present self who wants quick wins, and the Future YOU who is focused on who you become by taking action now. Present YOU would rather watch

TV than go for a run, but Future YOU is willing to whatever it takes now to live better later.

We make decisions based on these two identities. Present and future self are in constant conflict. As you learn to disengage from your present cravings and desires and become future oriented, you will notice a massive shift in your behavior.

You Can’t Make an Immediate Decision, and Decide to “Think on It.”

Whenever I was planning to procrastinate, I would say:

“Let me think about that.”

I would then walk away but never give it another thought. I remember thinking afterwards, “I hope they don’t follow up with me on this, because I have no intention of doing what they want.”

Weeks later, I’d run into the same person, or my boss would approach and ask about that thing I was supposed to do, and I’d have to ask for an extension.

If I let it go long enough, he’d just ask someone else. The habit of “let me think about it” became an excuse to delay making a commitment to something that could be decided on quickly.

When you do this often enough, people stop asking you. Eventually, they stop including you in decisions. Then you isolate yourself and nobody bothers you. This could work if one of your strengths is a deliberator and you need more time than the average person to decide, but for a procrastinator, it becomes an excuse to avoid doing the task altogether.

My suggestion:

Don’t let yourself get away with this. If you are in the habit of putting off hard things, this could be one excuse setting you up to fail. It starts with “I’ll get back to you later” or “check in with me tomorrow.”

But when tomorrow arrives, they can’t find you because you’re hiding in the back of the room, out of sight.

To overcome this delaying tactic, I decided the best thing to do was make a decision, commit, and do it on the spot. My decision would be either a yes or no. It didn’t matter what the outcome would be, or if I would regret it later. I simply made a concrete decision.

A decision to act had to be made, and I would make it. This was one less thing to think about, which opened up space in my mind for more creative and elaborate ideas.

You Get Busy Doing a “Low priority” Easy Task.

Doing effortless tasks gives you a false sense of accomplishment. You can do these things quickly (e.g., responding to the last ten emails in your inbox or moving papers around from one drawer to the next). You seek quick wins that pay off now and give you immediate gratification.

Fear #5: The Fear of Negative Feedback

People procrastinate because they are afraid of being evaluated or because they are afraid of receiving negative feedback from others.

When I was in school, one of my greatest fears was getting back the tests I knew I hadn't studied for and most likely failed. I procrastinated to study for anything and, this habit would eventually feed into a system of self-sabotage. I became very skilled at setting up my own failure.

With every test returned, I was guaranteed a C — or just a plain F. School was much easier when you can predict your own success or failure. But what I feared was the repercussions of criticism from others. It wasn't failing the tests that really bothered me, but the look on the teacher's face that said "here you go again."

It was the fear of criticism from my parents when they found out I was flunking through my senior year just after making it through Junior High School. I was really feeding into everyone's expectations. They expected me to fail, and I gave them what they wanted.

The fear of feedback—even if it is constructive—can lead to irrational behavior regarding procrastination. This fear causes us to hold back from giving it 100%. Or as I told you in the story, you become so accustomed to failing that you sabotage yourself.

This fear can live outside of your boundaries. You search for external validation from your environment that what you're doing is okay. To use a display of art as an example, if they like your painting, you feel successful and it validates your need to create more. If someone (or the majority) disapproves of your craft, you might never pick up a brush again.

For example, someone might delay publishing a blog post—or a book—because they're worried about what other people are going to think about it. Or the fear of signing up for a new art class because your creative genius will be viewed by others.

Most times, people's fears are irrationally exaggerated or unjustified, because the chances of receiving negative feedback are low, or because the consequences of that feedback aren't as significant as they feel.

Feedback is a learning curve, and it won't always be communicated in a flowery way. Some people will give you "positive feedback" that you can take away to make improvements on. Other feedback is more critical and it will hurt. But nothing is perfect or done to everyone's liking.

The Mona Lisa is one of the most famous paintings on the planet. Yet, according to polls, 23% of the people who have seen the painting are not satisfied. They were expecting something bigger?

Harry Potter is the bestselling book series on the planet, and on Amazon 84% of the reviews are 5-stars.

Your life is a life in progress, and welcoming feedback from your teachers, peers and friends is a good thing. But if it's perceived as an attack on character, I suggest reframing how you perceive and accept feedback. It's not the critical murmur that's the issue but how it is received.

If you grow up in an environment where criticism is harshly dished out, this affects the level it is received. People who are dealing with SAD (Social Anxiety Disorder) might be more sensitive to any kind of feedback and push back when it's given, even constructively.

Now, for procrastination, you might hold back on making that phone call, applying for a new job, or taking on a challenge at work.

Your mind begins the loophole of negative questioning: “What if they don’t hire me, is there something wrong? What if I make a fool of myself in front of everyone, will they brand me as incompetent?”

When you believe the worst about yourself, it fuels the avoidance addiction to stay away from anything that can cause you harm. As you know, when there is danger near, your ageless instincts kick in to protect your life from danger.

There are three strategies I can share with you to recover from the fear of criticism or feedback.

(1). Be aware of your avoidance tactics. With criticism, a strategy of avoidance is damaging your future. Aristotle once said, “There is only one way to avoid criticism: Do nothing, say nothing and be nothing.”

You must realize that, avoiding criticism makes you weaker. It’s not the criticism that injures you, but your reaction to it. This habit of task avoidance means you are withholding your gifts from the world. Don’t let your fear of criticism stand in the way of your success.

(2). Decide who has permission to criticize you. Not all criticizers are created equal, and some shouldn’t even have the right to criticize anything that you’re doing. Set boundaries for people that may provide you with constructive feedback and dismiss the rest.

Mentors are an excellent choice for those on the list, because they can provide actual practice receiving criticism in a safe environment, making it a less frightening experience.

My strategy is to make a list of people whom you are open to receiving this feedback from. Not that you should disregard anyone not on your list, but start with a short list and expand when you can add someone else. There are people you don't have to hear from, and this could be the case when they are used to criticizing everything you do without follow up for improvement.

Constructive criticism is about listening and receiving with the intention of improving. Someone who tells you, "You did a terrible job of this!" isn't interested in helping you.

Focus on Learning and Improvement, Not External Approval. When you adopt this philosophy, you're drawn to criticism as a positive tool that helps you grow, instead of avoiding it as a source of rejection. Consider what is constructive about criticism, find the nugget of truth in it, and let it elevate you to a greater level.

Reframe criticism as a method to help you scale up and become greater today than you were yesterday. Turn towards the voices that are feeding you to help move forward. When it is your turn to deliver feedback, you can provide constructive feedback to someone else when intending to help that person.

Taking Control of Your

Procrastinating Mind

When I could identify with my fears, and recognize that the greatest enemy in my life is my own mind, I made a promise to myself: From that moment, I would no longer be scared to do hard things. I would do all the things that were hiding in my closet, under the bed, and in every dark place of my mind, where fear

protected my comfort.

If the mind really is the greatest asset we have, let's turn this weapon into a useful tool for success instead of failure. At the end of the day, how you live your life comes down to how you manage your mind.

We must resist the temptation to listen to the lies of the mind, which is the ego protecting the barriers. Fear becomes courage when you overcome it. You will always be afraid. We do not defeat fear as though it were an enemy in battle. Rather, we confront this fear, and instead of negotiating for peace, we simply say, "I'm taking over the castle. Now step aside."

But, we know as procrastinators that it's not always that easy. Even with the greatest intentions, our best efforts fail us. The mind of the rational procrastinator is in a constant struggle with the internal enemy…our own monkey mind!

You must position yourself to be the person you always wanted. Fear will step aside, and courage will get you started on the journey.

You do not need more courage. You don’t have to learn a new trick or pay for a course on how to feel better about yourself. You have everything you need inside of you now.

You are courageous. You have always had courage inside you. Nobody can reach inside and pull it out of you, except you.

In months to come, I focused on creating a new mind. I would sit with my thoughts for up to thirty minutes a day. I read books written by great philosophers and personal development masters such as Jim Rohn, Tony Robbins and Zig Ziggler.

I turned my hopelessness into a mission with purpose. I developed a great sense of peace and calm like I’d never felt before. It was as if the chaos that I had been living in fell silent.

The self-rejection, judgment, and self-imposed limitations no longer had a hold on me.

I recognized the sense of freedom because I was letting go. I could see how I had trapped my fear in a bottle and had been living inside the bottle with it.

If you have ever heard of the glass ceiling concept, it is a metaphor that originated back in the 80s to describe women or minorities who were prevented from attaining advanced positions at work. We can use this to describe our personal limitations.

This happens when you reach a certain stage and you can no longer advance or progress. You remain stuck where you are while everyone else earns promotion, moves on with their lives, and makes substantial progress.

I was pushing against a glass ceiling in my mind, and when it was removed, I became free to do anything. The glass ceiling represented my self-imposed limits. Without doubt, the barrier was me.

Now that the problem had been revealed, I had to take massive action and start moving forward. Being stuck was painful. Repeating the same mistakes and believing the worst about my limited abilities was unacceptable. As human beings, we are built to explore and grow. The path to greatness lies in doing what hurts.

When I feel that old enemy, fear, sinking into my stomach, I take a moment to stop, breathe and ask myself, “What do you fear happening? Why are you afraid? What negative outcome are predicting?”

In most cases, my fears are wrapped around the fear of rejection, failing, or not measuring up. If I did such-and-such, I could be made to look like a fool or, worse still, incompetent.

Fears of the mind appear real. It’s easy to convince yourself that the voices talking to you are a separate entity. But in reality, the voice is you—it’s your inner child hiding from the dark. It’s your ego ashamed of the outcome if things don’t go exactly according to plan.

There is no such thing as a perfect plan. There will never be a perfect outcome, either. The only guarantee we have is that by feeding the fear and NOT taking direct action, failure is inevitable.

A great piece of advice a mentor once said to me is this:

"Get comfortable with change. Create new habits to support your goals. That's how you break fear."

My fear of surrendering to comfort habits was keeping me trapped. If I truly wanted to live a life with intention, I needed to let go of old routines, create new behaviors, and set up better habits to support the life I want to lead.

To overcome these fears, I had to approach every day with a new mindset. Fear leads to inaction and paralysis analysis. Most of this fear was wired into bad habits that supported fear. In order to change, it meant doing things in a new way, taking risks in trying new things, and taking charge of doing uncomfortable challenges.

When the fear of staying the same is greater than the fear of moving ahead, you must act. Everything about my fear was centered on failure. I feared failing at the tasks I didn't know how to do. I feared not being able to do my best. I feared the world would judge me when I made a mistake. I feared the consequences of disappointing my family.

I was afraid of failure, and this fear feeds into the procrastination habit. We avoid doing hard things for fear of disappointing ourselves. But the greatest disappointment is not in failing from trying; it is failure by default for doing nothing and allowing fear to govern the course of your life.

By listening to my fears of failure and not measuring up to my self-expectations, I was creating more fear. It becomes a feedback loop, reinforcing the fear. I would spend my days running around in circles, seeking distraction. But looking busy isn't the same as moving forward and making positive progress.

Believing in your fears more than in yourself puts fear in a position of power. It strengthens your attachment to everything you fear doing.

Doing the Hard Things First is about breaking the fear of taking direct action towards the tasks that intimidate us. When you protect your fear, you engage in the easy work, or "comfort tasks". These are old habits that stick around because they are predictable.

If you are living a life of predictability, you could be living from a place of old habits and from a routine that keeps you stuck in a rut.

I was addicted to the old way of doing things and expecting different results. Not only is this unrealistic, but it's a formula for failure.

As Albert Einstein said, "The definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result."

The real wins are waiting for you in the higher places., but you must build new habits to reach them. If you continue to climb the same set of stairs to reach the top, you will always arrive at the same destination.

Remember this…

You are greatness. You are courageous. You are fearless. You lack for nothing and hold the keys to your eternal universe.

Repeat the following mantra to yourself every day as many times as possible:

"I am great. I am fearless. I am courageous."

Pushing Forward

You now understand the fears playing behind the curtain of all your doubts, uncertainties, and fears. However, the why needs a how, and in the next section, I have a systematic approach coming up soon to help you break down your procrastination habit.

Let’s keep your momentum moving and dive into the reasons we delay doing the hard work first, if we end up doing it at all

...

Ten Reasons We Delay

Doing the Work

"I find that the harder I work, the more luck

I seem to have."

— Thomas Jefferson

In the previous chapter, we looked at the five core fears that feed procrastination. Now, here is a breakdown of ten reasons we are lured into delaying the important works in our lives.

If you're wondering why you procrastinate, look through this list, and try to figure out which of these causes of procrastination apply to you. Try to be honest with yourself while you do this, since figuring out the underlying causes of your procrastination is critical in order to successfully recover from it.

To successfully deal with your procrastination, you need to figure out why you procrastinate, and how your procrastination is preventing you from achieving your goals, so you can formulate a concrete plan of action, based on appropriate anti-procrastination techniques, that will help you deal with your procrastination triggers.

Besides the five core fears, here are the ten most common reasons we procrastinate. Identify the reasons for procrastination that describe you the best. Don't pull yourself apart with this exercise. You are here to heal and not judge yourself for being less than perfect.

I want you to stay fixed on the magnificent human being you are right now. And how much greater you can become when you to heal from the pain that we experience through task avoidance.

We know we're fearful; we know we have faults. Welcome to the human experience.

Let's unpack each of these for better clarity. Identifying 1-3 reasons you practice task avoidance will help you heal faster. As you work through this system and break apart the lies, everything you have ever wanted is on the other side waiting for you.

Potential Rewards in the Future

People will procrastinate on tasks that are associated with rewards that they will only receive while completing the task. Since people discount the value of rewards that are far in the future, this is known as temporal or delay discounting.

It's easier to discount the value of saving money now compared to a goal of saving in the future. The future self wants to have money, but the present self would rather enjoy life and go on a spending spree.

You might take part in a present bias mindset when making a choice to engage in activities rewarding you in the short-term, at the expense of working on tasks potentially leading to better outcomes for in the long term.

Note that the relationship between the time to receive a reward and the perceived value of that reward is usually inconsistent, as the rate of discounting decreases. This means that the farther into the future a reward is,

the less the increase in time matters in lowering that reward's perceived value.

For example, while there is a big difference in how we value a reward that we can receive now compared to a reward we can receive in a week, there is a much smaller difference in how we value a reward we can receive in a year compared to a reward we can receive in a year plus a week.

Similarly, while there is a big difference between receiving a reward in a day compared to in a year, there is less of a difference between receiving a reward in a year compared to receiving it in two years.

This phenomenon is called hyperbolic discounting, and it's contrasted with exponential discounting, which is a time-consistent model of temporal discounting, where an increased delay before receiving a reward always has the same effect on its perceived value, regardless of how far in the future it is.

Someone might delay with eating healthy, even if their doctor told them it's important, because the harmful impact of their present diet will only start being a serious issue in a couple of years, which they view as someone else's problem (i.e. as the problem of their future self).

This disconnect between the present and future selves can cause people to procrastinate in a variety of ways. For example, it can cause them to think that their present-self shouldn't have to worry about the future, since their future self will be the one who has to handle any tasks that they postpone or deal with any consequences for failing to complete those tasks on time.

Similarly, it can cause them to think that their present-self shouldn't have to bother with getting things done now, if their future self will be the one who reaps the rewards of their actions.

Accordingly, people often display a present bias when they choose to engage in activities that reward them in the short-term, at the expense of working on tasks that would lead to better outcomes for them in the long term.

Weak Capacity for Regulating Self-Control

Self-control—or self-regulation—reflects a person's ability to control their emotional and habitual behavior in order to follow through on activities. Self-control fails when you give into leading to poor health or weak cognitive function.

A lack of self-control makes people much more likely to procrastinate, because this is directly related to regulating your ability to manage yourself.

A person operating on low self-control might watch TV for hours, while continually telling themselves that they'll get started on their work just as soon as this show is over.

Insufficient self-control can lead people to engage in behaviors that are easily accessible, even if they're not inherently appealing, instead of working on tasks that are more inherently appealing.

In Do the Hard Things First, we will work on the best tactics to raise your awareness of self-control and help to manage those moments when you are feeling a lack of control over choices.

Task Aversion/Task Avoidance

People often procrastinate because they are averse to the tasks that they need to perform. It is this mental resistance that triggers the mind to seek pleasure-centric activities as a means of diversion.

For example, if you need to make an important phone call to someone you dislike, you might end up watching TV or playing a video game instead of getting it done.

This occurs when you find a specific task unappealing, and the stronger the dislike, the more likely you want to avoid it, and therefore the more likely to delay on taking action.

There are many things that can make a person averse to a task in a way that causes them to procrastinate. For example, a person might procrastinate because they perceive a task as frustrating, tedious, or boring. They might procrastinate because they believe there is a gap between the difficulty of the task and their own competence, so they feel the task is too difficult for them to handle.

Anxiety-Related Tasks

Do you ever feel stressed just thinking about doing a certain task? If so, there is a high probability you'll procrastinate on it.

You might procrastinate because you feel anxious about a task that needs to get done...and you are avoiding doing it.

This becomes an issue when your anxiety increases because of procrastination. This can lead to a feedback loop where you feel anxious about a specific task (paying a bill, having a hard conversation), which causes you to procrastinate instead of taking direct action. The

procrastination loop cycle makes you even more anxious, which traps you into procrastinating even more.

Maybe you feel anxious about making a doctor's appointment because you have a slight pain in your lower back that won't go away. So, you wait for it to get better and it doesn't. Now you really feel anxious, and you must go.

There are a lot of things we often push off, hoping they just "disappear", but some things don't. The longer you put it off, the worse you feel.

Procrastination is a tactic used to avoid the pain of uncomfortable activities or tasks that cause stress. It's important to mention here that, with stress, anxiety or overwhelm, these feelings are in direct relation to the thoughts you're creating. Yes, thought creates the experience.

When you bend your thoughts towards doing the task and receiving a positive result from this, the next time you have anxiety when doing your taxes, think about the outcome.

How will you feel after working on your taxes for thirty minutes? Even if you don't finish, you started something. Now you have the confidence to call that doctor, or make an appointment online? Now you feel great, and your feeling has shifted from anxiety to a relaxed state.

You might have other reasons for experiencing anxiety, so this only relates to issues brought on by procrastination and delaying critical tasks. But the trigger is, you feel overwhelmed before doing it, and great relief after taking action.

ADHD (Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder)

This book doesn’t dive into ADHD specifically. However, ADHD affects 20% of children and adults. Research proves that there is a direct correlation between engaging in ADHD-related behaviors and procrastination. If this is the case, I will make three recommendations:

Visit your local doctor to seek advice on getting tested.

A book that has helped me significantly (besides getting tested) is Driven to Distraction by Edward M. Hallowell, M.D. and John J. Ratey, M.D.

Learn more by visiting the American Psychiatric Association here: https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/adhd/what-is-adhd

Abstract or Unclear Goals

People are more likely to procrastinate when their goals are vague, abstract, or without timeframes. When you have goals that are concrete, clearly defined and with built-in timeframes, you are more energized and focused on what needs to be done.

For example: I want to “get into shape” or “begin exercising” is too vague to have any motivational energy. Or, “I want to save money this year.”

Throw away the vague goals and get very specific on what you want.

“I want to lose 5 kilograms in the next sixty days, and to achieve this goal, I will work out three times a week on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. In addition, I will stop eating sugar-based snacks and do 20 minutes of cardio per day.”

If you want to save money this year: “I intend to save $300 a month by paying myself first, and at the beginning of each month, put this money

away in a separate account.” You can go deeper with detail on your goals by brainstorming ideas for how to earn more money or save on expenses. You get the idea.

I will cover goal setting in more detail in the next section.

Internal Struggle with Perfectionism

The perfectionist believes in a world that must be perfect, and they apply all their energy and resources into creating the perfect environment, the perfect career, the perfect way of life. Perfectionism is a powerful disillusion; it is the ultimate lie. It does not exist but in the minds of those that pursue it with relentless obsession.

Perfectionists live in a world of black and white, an all-or-nothing way of thinking that fuels the belief that every minor detail has to have the indelible seal of perfection stamped on it. There is no middle road and no forgiveness of self (or others) for errors or failure.

Perfectionism can lead to procrastination in several ways, such as by making someone so afraid of making a mistake that they end up not taking any action at all, or by making someone so worried of publishing something with any flaws that they end up reworking their project indefinitely instead of releasing it when it’s ready.

For example, someone might delay working on their book, because they want every line that they write to be perfect from the start, which causes them to not write anything at all.

Similarly, someone who has finished writing their book might repeatedly delay sending it out for feedback, because they want to make sure that it’s absolutely flawless first, so they keep going over it, again and again.

While it’s reasonable to want to create and publish high-quality work, the problem starts when perfectionists aim for unattainable flawlessness, which causes them to procrastinate by giving them a seemingly valid excuse for unnecessary delays.

Perfectionism isn’t always a negative thing and only leads to issues when it causes people to unnecessarily delay things because they’re overly worried about their work not being flawless.

If the perfectionist trap is one behavior holding you back, you probably have derived an immense pleasure-gain from this. But the fact is that everything in life is flawed. The people, places, and things around you have real flaws.

Attraction for Creating Self-Sabotage

The act of self-sabotage is self-defeat that will have a long-term detrimental impact. There are many reasons someone would continue to engage in behavior that can harm them physically or mentally, but the act of deliberately procrastinating leads to a continuous path of self-destruction as you try to sabotage your own progress.

A person might delay applying for a new job, even though they knew it represents a great opportunity for career advancement. Someone eats junk food day after day, even though the doctor warned of the dangers of obesity.

We will look at self-sabotage in the next section and how to recover from this.

Lack of Motivation, Energy or Laziness

Low energy levels can lead you to put everything off indefinitely. If you work long hours, lack of exercise or feeding into negative thinking, the result can be low energy levels that make you want to do nothing. This leads also to laziness and lack of motivation.

Laziness reflects a person's intrinsic unwillingness to put in the effort needed to achieve their goals, even when they can do so.

You might procrastinate in cleaning the home, simply because you don't feel like doing it.

Here is a short tip that works for me: Begin working on something and the motivation and energy will come. You start with the 5-minute strategy. Get started now.

In many situations, people might assume that their procrastination is driven by laziness when it's actually occurring because of another underlying reason, such as anxiety or fear of failure.

If you think or feel unmotivated, that is what we are here for. To bring out the best in your actions so that you can push forward and make better progress while crushing the false beliefs of "I'm a failure."

You're not a failure if you lack motivation. You just need to be motivated by the right triggers.

Confusion from Decision Fatigue

Decision fatigue is a form of procrastination, and is referred to as decisional procrastination, or analysis paralysis. It usually involves a delay in making a decision when too many choices are presented.

This can be an issue that holds you back indefinitely, in deciding which course of action to engage in first. Do I take door A or door B? if there is a third option, it becomes more overwhelming, and unable to decide, you choose to not decide. You say, “I’ll get to this later” or “I need to think on it.” I face this situation many times, and when I walk away without deciding, I rarely close the loop. Feeling overwhelmed, I’ll leave it hanging.

Decisional procrastination has long-term detrimental effects. You can’t move forward if you can’t decide. I’ve been stuck many times on one thing for months, and sometimes, years. Unable or unwilling to decide, that task never gets finished, but it still takes up space in your mind.

For example: You might delay working out, because you can’t decide which exercise plan to follow. Or you can’t decide which gym to join, the cheaper that closes early, or the more expensive gym that’s open 24 hours. You might delay on who to hire to remodel your bathroom, because you have three different quotes and they all look good!

When confronted with choice paralysis, here are the key factors to consider:

The more options you have, the harder it will be for you to choose. The more options you have to choose from, the harder it will be for you to evaluate them and decide which one is preferable.

The more similar your options are to one another, the harder it will be for you to choose. The more similar the options are, the harder it will be for you to decide which one is better, especially where there isn’t a single option that is clearly preferable to the others. If the choices are relatively close in value, it becomes more challenging.

The more important the choice is, the harder it will be for you to choose. The greater the consequences of deciding on a plan action, the harder it will be for you to complete your decision. You are more likely to delay before making a major decision than you are before making a minor one.

It's important to remember that each time you have to decide and can't, you end up depleting your mental resources through indecisiveness. The more decisions you have to make during a certain time period, the more you deplete your capacity for self-control, and you run the risk to procrastinate further in making future decisions, at least until you have a chance to recharge yourself mentally.

Decision-making is never easy, but as Tony Robbins said, "It's in your moments of decision that your destiny is shaped."

But making a decision is only the first step. Commit to your decision and take deliberate action to reach the desired outcome.

It is important to ask these critical questions:

What action would you choose right now if you could make one decision?

What decision, if made, might change everything for you?

Don't think about the result or the ultimate outcome; take a moment to make the decision that you've been struggling with the most. Then focus on the actions that will take you straight to your goal.

"All progress takes place outside the comfort zone."

— Michael John Bobak

Now that we covered the five big fears and core reasons for potentially holding you back, it’s time for a deep-dive into implementation. In the next section, we will cover the system for procrastination recovery. I recommend having a pen and paper handy to take notes. Now is the time to dive deeper into the strategies!

There are always limits, and there are always opportunities. The ones we rehearse and focus on are the ones we take action on.

— Seth Godin

Part II: Practical Steps for Doing the Hard Things First

Strategic Tactics for Getting It Done

"The habit of always putting off an experience until you can afford it, or until the time is right, or until you know how to do it is one of the greatest burglars of joy. Be deliberate, but once you've made up your mind – jump in."

— Charles R. Swindoll

In this section, I'll introduce you to the best strategies for beating procrastination and doing all those hard things you have been avoiding. You can move at your own pace, but I suggest working on one strategy and completing it before moving on to the next.

You can focus on one of your obstacles as a trial run for this system. Work through it until you have completed your task. You might finish it in just a few steps without reading through all the material. If so, fantastic! Choose an obstacle that has really challenged you over the last month or so and use this as a test run.

Take notes and apply what you learn here to future tasks. By the time you work through this process in its entirety, you will have minimized the procrastination habit to a low hum.

The overwhelming grip it appeared to have on your willpower will be significantly diminished, and for the first time in a long time, you will experience a new sense of freedom.

Step 1: Take Total Ownership for Behavior Change

"We shall never have more time. We have, and have always had, all the time there is. No object is served in waiting until next week or even until tomorrow. Keep going day in and day out. Concentrate on something useful. Having decided to achieve a task, achieve it at all costs."

— Arnold Bennett

You are responsible for your own behavior. This is true for your habits, thoughts, actions, and decisions. You are responsible for your success, failures, and the quality of your lifestyle. When you step up and own everything, you are waiting for nothing to show up and make life better.

You are the captain of your vessel called "successful living" and by taking total ownership, you become a person of deep influence.

This is what happens to failures: When things go terribly wrong, you tend to look for someone to blame. You make excuses for your failure. You blame others for your procrastination. You wait for inspiration and complain when life delivers a terrible blow to your health or finances.

Knowing that you can't stop external events is the key. It is how you choose to respond.

The moment you take ownership of your procrastinating ways, everything will change. You can change your own behavior, and you can teach others how this is done so they model what it takes to take total ownership of life.

When I almost filed for bankruptcy for the second time in my life, I had lots of people and places to blame:

As reality came crashing in on me, a colleague pointed out to me one day:

“You know, all this could be avoided if you just did what you had to do to stay out of debt and stop overspending.”

As I looked at my situation, I could see the pattern of chronic procrastination working behind the scenes. Instead of tracking expenses—like most people do—I would come up with excuses for not acting.

“I’ve never been good at that.” (Because I’ve never been good at that, it gives me permission to continue the same behavior.)

“I don’t have to, because I know exactly what I’m spending it on.” (Truth was, I had no idea.)

Instead of setting up investments, I said, “There will be time for that later. I’m too busy now spending it.”

Instead of talking over banking and money issues with my wife, I told myself, “She knows what’s going on. If she didn’t, she’d say something.” I was putting off the hard task of opening up a discussion.

The patterns are painfully obvious when the house is burning down and when you search for the arsonist, you discover that you're the only one holding the matches. Everyone else has already fled the burning building.

The first step in Doing the Hard Things First must take total ownership of your life.

To push ahead and crush the challenges standing in your way, you must be willing to take full ownership over your life. This is not a burden but a great gift. When other people rely on you to help them, this responsibility turns into a much-needed service you offer the world.

This means analyzing everything you think, say, and do. The way you think (your beliefs) feeds into how you feel (your emotions) and triggers you to act (your behavior).

The behavior of putting off important tasks begins with the "I'll do it later" fragmented thinking. And if I don't do it, does it matter? I'm sure somebody else will.

But nobody else can. Or will. Or wants to. You have to stop your own house from burning down before the fire starts. If you can't help yourself, nobody will come to the rescue.

You are the only one making a choice to procrastinate. You put things off in your mind first. Then, you build a wall of excuses why it can't be done. Then you create limitations to defend the wall, and after that, you stay mired behind your defenses, hoping that nothing breaks through. But what you have done is create a prison for your mind.

It isn’t the world you are defending yourself against, it’s yourself that you’re at war with. Your mission is to take control of your castle. Guard it with your life. Take total ownership of what is yours.

Build Your Defenses

You create your own experience by taking full ownership of your life. To become a success, half the battle is getting over the defensive walls of excuses, blame and escape tactics you’ve built to defend your chronic habit.

I had to ask myself, “How much is enough? How many times do I want to disappoint myself, my family, and my coworkers? How much longer will I delay the actions that influence my growth?”

Now, are you prepared to do whatever it takes to break this habit?

It begins here.

I’m ready every morning because I ask myself one question at the start of the day:

“Am I willing to do anything to become procrastination free?”

Yes! Freedom is the ability to create change, and you have the power to create anything you want. The procrastination habit disempowers you in every way. It makes you weak, and it sets you up for failing hard. We must change this to a mindset designed for taking intentional action—and taking it now.

Taking total ownership over everything in your life moves you from the passenger's side of your new Maserati to the driver's seat. You are in control of the journey to take you from here to there. You get to decide what action steps to take and how to navigate your path regardless of the weather or road conditions.

This is a journey built through progress, and taking it one mile at a time.

Make Your Definitive Decision

Now, you get to create this reality as you let go of the old habits and behaviors that are failing you.

Just as you take responsibility for your personal life, you also take responsibility for the work that only you can do.

You fail to take responsibility when you:

To succeed and break your habit of task avoidance, you must:

End the Excuses Train

I used to make lots of excuses to explain why my life wasn't working out the way I wanted it to. My excuses ranged from, "It can wait until later" to "I'm just not good at that," or, "Somebody will take care of it (as long as it's not me)."

I made so many excuses that I had developed a victim mentality. The lies of my own limitations were endless. I can still hear the voice in my head saying:

“You know it wasn’t your fault. If only…”

“I told her to take care of that. She has put me in an inferior position!”

“Why are they always out to get me?”

There was always someone or something to blame:

Bosses, parents, children, or a situation that I had nothing to do with (even if I created it).

When I had an enjoyable experience, I could take credit for it. If it was an unpleasant experience, it belonged on someone else’s shelf.

The path to failure is mired in guilt, shame and blame. I knew that to fail meant blaming an external event, circumstance, or individual for my failure. This is a recipe for more failure on a larger scale. Like a tsunami that builds before it breaks, you create success or failure in your life all the time.

You are responsible for the results. It’s totally fine to fail—I hope you do so you can learn from it—but when you do, own it right away.

The moment you begin complaining and using the victim cycle, you have just given up your personal power. Stop giving away your precious fuel of gratitude, love and acceptance.

Doing the hard things first isn’t difficult. The only thing blocking you is your decision to do it. The next step is to make it a priority. You have a

choice, to do it now or later.

You have two choices:

(2). Create the circumstances you want by taking total ownership over your thoughts, choices and actions.

Implementation Task:

(1). Write the names of five people you frequently complain about. Next to each name, write down three positive traits/qualities about them. In the future, when you catch yourself complaining, recite these five traits connected with that person.

(2). Identify the one area in your life that you avoid taking responsibility for. Is it your relationships? Finances? Job? If it's all the above, identify the one area that needs the most attention.

(3). Finally, when you awaken every morning, recite your own mantra. Begin with, "This is my life, and I'm totally responsible for it. Now let this day begin." The rest of the mantra is up to you. Use the mantra in this chapter until you have created your own.

"Procrastination is opportunities assassin."

— Victor Kiam

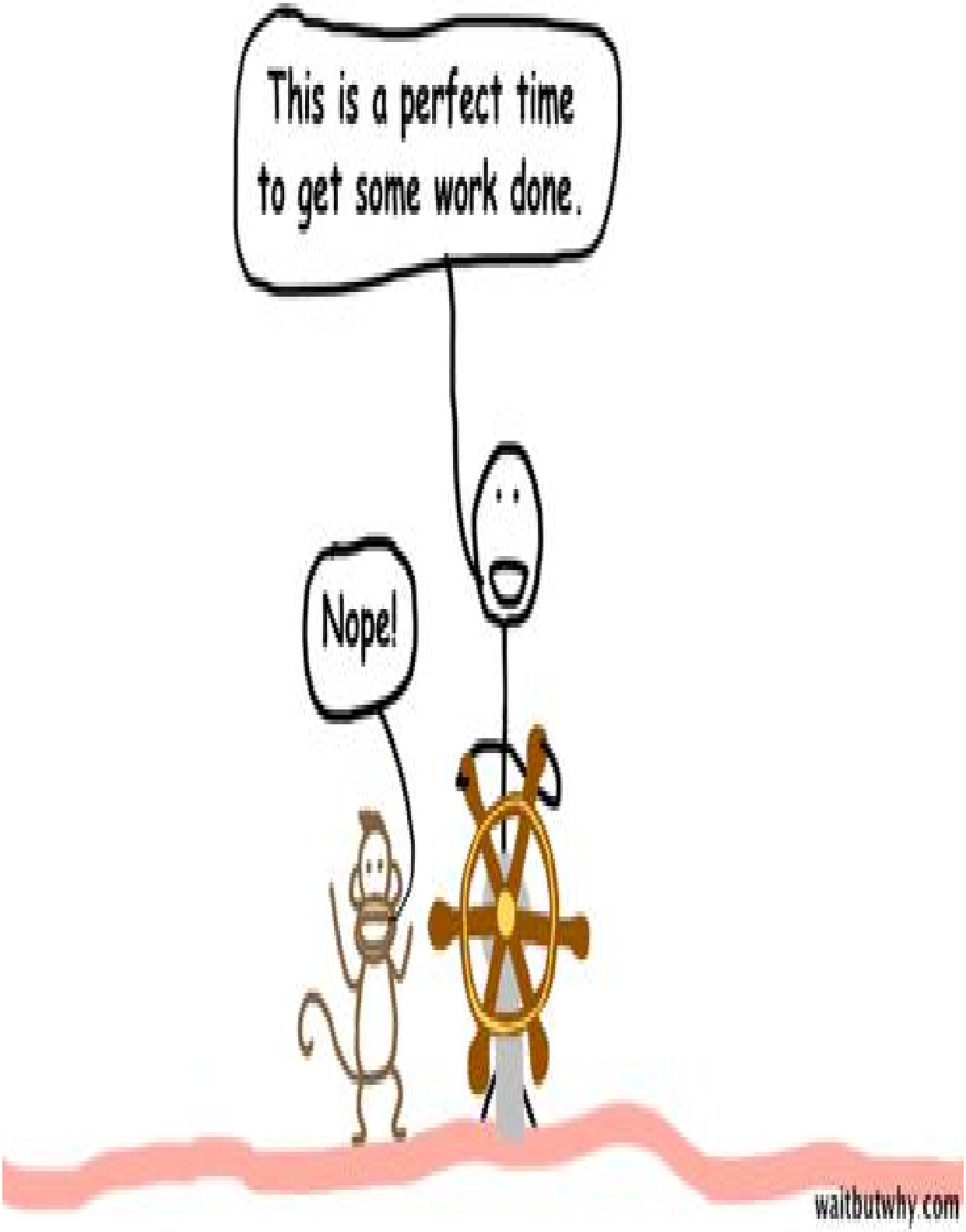
This is a perfect time to get some work done.
Nope!
waitbutwhy.com

Illustration courtesy of Tim Urban @ waitbutwhy.com

Step 2: Make Your List of Things-to-get-done

"There is nothing so fatal to character as half-finished tasks."

— David Lloyd George

This activity was introduced to me by a friend who struggled with Doing Hard Things at home and in his business. In fact, he almost lost both as a final outcome. Eventually, he learned the value of doing the things that matter first so that they didn't cost him more in the future.

The procrastinator inside of you loves lists. I can remember starting my day with a list of tasks that looks like this:

Write 2000 words for my next book

Clean the bathroom

Check email and respond to the first ten messages

Write a blog post

Revise my to-do-list

Recheck email again and respond to the next 10 messages

So, the day would begin, and by lunchtime, after chasing all of my to-dos and urgent tasks, I was exhausted. During the first few hours of the morning, I would task switch ten times easily while working with 30+ tabs open on my computer and working from 3 separate action lists.

Procrastinators love lists and looking busy. We love to just dive right into the work, even if it doesn't go anywhere (and most often than not, it doesn't). We love planning, and planning out our plans, and making lists of all the things we plan to do that never actually get done. If I take all my lists and notebooks with intentional future plans, I'd have an architect's nightmare.

In effect, our planning is really a plan to fail. This is how we end up with half-built bridges leading to nowhere. I want you to think about this when you sit down to map out your plans.

Like most of us professional procrastinators, you probably have good intentions. To work hard and get the work done. But the work that gets your focus isn't always important, but rather urgent and unimportant.

We can't avoid life! We must take intentional action and break our self-imposed glass ceilings.

This begins with total clarity.

In order to take intentional action, you must know what you're taking action towards. This begins with building a list. I call this the "anti-procrastination" list. It is a list that includes all the:

Unfinished tasks around home, the office, or in your personal life?

Projects that you have been meaning to begin, but haven't gotten to them yet?

Things that MUST be done ASAP because they are urgent (a bill that was due last month and still hasn't been paid?)

Broken things and clutter in the corners

Pets with super-long hair that haven’t been groomed in a couple of years

And anything else that takes up your mental space that needs, must and should be done.

How to Begin Building Your List

Think about a difficult task that you avoid doing. Is it updating your financial records? Starting an exercise routine? Talking with your children about a difficult subject? Updating your resume for a new job? Decluttering your computer’s desktop?

Right now, make a list of the first five things that come to your mind. These could be projects you haven’t started (or finished), or something you started but gave up halfway through.

For the next five minutes, write down everything else you can think of that needs doing. It doesn’t matter what it is. If your desktop needs to be organized, add it to the list. A bookshelf has too many books on it you haven’t touched in years. Write it down. A form needs filling out, add it to the list. You haven’t filed taxes in 3 years (yikes!) it goes on the list.

Okay, so I've got: Read up on stuff to be more knowledgeable at work; Do house improvements; Come up with book idea; Learn how to code; Plan trip with friends; Get into Asian cooking; Think about new career; and 24 more.
Sounds perfect.

Illustration courtesy of Tim Urban @ waitbutwhy.com

This is a brainstorming task so you just have to be ready to put pen to paper, or use a Word Doc/Google Docs if you prefer.

This activity will be an eye-opener for helping you get clarity around the things that are hiding in your dark places. There will be goals long abandoned, reports or applications you haven't written up, broken things around home still broken, and possibly a mountain of open loops that will emerge as we work through this. More on closing open loops later, but right now, you need to realize what you have been avoiding.

One more important point: Keep this list to ten items or fewer. The less the better. We want to prepare well, but navigate away from creating overwhelm. This happens when we have too many choices (aka too many things on a to-do-list).

Paper and pen ready?

Implementation Strategy: Make Your Procrastination List of Hard Things to Do

Go! Make your list and write down everything you can think of for the next five minutes. This list doesn't have to be complete or perfect. You can add to it as you work through the rest of the book.

The key is to get started.

Note that this is not a to-do-list. You're not doing anything yet, we are just setting things up now (planning) so we can do stuff later.

It's about getting started.

Start now.

Success comes when you begin.

"If and When were planted, and

Nothing grew."

— Proverb

“Procrastinators are great visionaries—they love to fantasize about the beautiful mansion they will one day have built—but what they need to be are gritty construction workers, who methodically lay one brick after the other, day after day, without giving up, until a house is built.”

— Tim Urban, Professional Procrastinator and Ted Talk Speaker@waitbutwhy.com

Step 3: Decide You're Doing It... Now

"If there are nine rabbits on the ground, if you want to catch one, just focus on one."

— Jack Ma

Look at the list you created in the previous step. You have a list of at least five tasks that you've been delaying for as long as you can remember.

You might have five items, or forty-seven. The fewer the better, so what you can do right now is narrow the list to your top five.

The rest of the tasks you can forget for now. If cleaning the bathroom has been on your list for six months, and you're still able to use it with little disruption to your life, letting it go for a few more days or weeks won't make a difference.

Your list of five items should be your top influencers.

Now, choose one thing from your list. This is your big WINNER. Ideally, it is something you can do today. If it requires too much time, you won't get it done quickly and might give up.

Choose something that can be done in ten minutes or less if you have it. This will be your small win for the day.

Next, make a decision to do this one thing. By taking the first action step, you are making the easiest decision there is—just to begin.

Most people fail to start anything because they fail to begin with the smallest task first. But whatever it is, make a decision that you will do it. Just say, “I’m doing this now!”

As you know, there are many other things you can do, but there is only one thing you must do right now. This is the difficult work. Right now, as you work through this book, it took me nearly three months to complete the final draft and get it ready for the editor. It normally takes me three weeks to write a book, but I spent months putting it off.

When I sat down to work on this book (a book on how to beat procrastination), within minutes I would find myself drifting and looking for something else to do. The truth is, I hadn’t fully committed to getting this one thing finished before moving onto the next project.

To reach the end of a task or body of work, you must start working on it. And not just once but, by committing to showing up every day, and hack away at the work until it’s finished.

The decision you must make now is… am I doing this or not? If the answer is YES, you go all in. You are making a promise to yourself that this does matter and you are doing it… now. Even if you don’t know yet what the first step is. Commit to the task and begin.

The biggest obstacle to not starting the project is actually starting the project. I would rather start over one hundred times than never have started anything at all. But you must make the decision, and commitment to doing it.

Making a concrete decision is a powerful action step. It means you're taking a stand. You're taking total responsibility.

A decision triggers momentum. It is your first step towards change. If you are stuck in life, you haven't truly decided where you're going.

Imagine getting into your car with no clear destination, and instead of driving somewhere, you just sit there in the driver's seat, confused about what you should be doing. Alternatively, you know where you want to be but don't know the route.

We will work on the action steps next, but for today, you only have to decide that you are doing this.

The Challenge:

Take your first step towards doing it now.

Note: Minimize the number of decisions you have to make. The more decisions you have to make during a certain time period, the more fatigued you become, and the more likely you are to procrastinate on making a decision.

By minimizing the number of decisions to make, you can improve your ability to make decisions quickly, while limiting the resistance that gets in the way.

Implementation Task:

Make a Decision: Take a look at the unfinished tasks in your environment that require your immediate attention. Decide right now to do it. Don't worry about how long it might take or whether you have the right skillset. You can figure this out as you go along. Write down the decision you are making. For example:

In five minutes, I'm decluttering the closet

I'm filling in the first few boxes on this job application right now.

I'm cleaning out the trunk of my car (Note: Notice this is only one part of the car, and not cleaning the whole thing. Take it in small stages).

If you still struggle with doing it now, the next step takes you one stage further…

"Procrastination is NOT the same as doing nothing. Doing nothing is often creative. But procrastination is often about fear. Fear is not creative. — Joanne Harris

Step 4: Write It Down. Five Times.

"Success is not obtained overnight. It comes in installments; you get a little bit today, a little bit tomorrow until the whole package is given out. The day you procrastinate, you lose

that day's success."

— Israelmore Ayivor

Research has shown writing down your goals is 70% more likely to generate success. It's not just general recall that improves when you write things down. Writing it down will improve your recall of the important information. Writing things down makes your mind more efficient by helping you focus on the critical task at hand.

Your mind isn't lazy, it just needs to be disciplined with a new set of behaviors. It begins with focusing in on the task with laser-focused precision.

Writing things down calls for a higher level of focused action. When your brain isn't busy remembering everything, your brain can process anything. For this reason, writing things down can help our brains prioritize that which we should focus and act on at any given moment.

Here are four reasons you should write things down. If you want to do it, start writing it!

1. Writing things down helps clarify your intentions.

Writing things down connects emotion to the task and streamlines the process. You will have a better chance of recalling your hard things to do tasks by writing them out.

The act of writing and committing words to paper etches the action into your mind. This improves your memory and you're more likely to take intentional action towards the task.

Writing things down makes your mind more efficient by helping you focus on the truly important stuff.

2. Writing it down tracks what you have accomplished

Keeping a journal of the tasks worked on for that day, week and quarter is a paper trail. It helps you to trace back on all the things you've achieved.

If you revisit your notes at the end of each month, you might discover that you have accomplished several hard tasks that you'd been putting off for ages.

You will have a record of all the difficult tasks you acted on. When you finish it, don't throw your list away, but record it in your journal and use it as a method to track your work. By doing this, you will elevate your sense of accomplishment.

3. Writing it down encourages focused action.

It is easier to maintain focus when the task you are working on is pasted in front of you. My system for this is to write the one thing I'm working on directly onto a sticky note. I paste this on the side of my MacBook next to the touchpad. I can look down and see it when I'm working. If I'm not working on the task I've set out to do, my focus must have drifted.

4. Writing it down is a preview of what is coming

When you imagine the desired task, your mind discovers a way to make it reality. By writing it down, research suggests that—as far as our brain is concerned—it's as if we were doing that thing in the now.

Writing it acts as a rehearsal for doing the intended task.

Implementation Task:

Write down your task five times. Use a separate notebook for this. Write the date at top of the page and use one page per day.

I have a notebook/journal and use it to write down all of my hard tasks. When I write these down, I am specific about the action I'm taking. Writing it makes it real.

"Life always begins with one step outside of your comfort zone."

— Shannon L. Alder

Step 5: Time Block Five Minutes to Start Doing It

"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

— Will Durant

Scheduling your simple task for five minutes is the simplest strategy to start working on a task right away. When you're avoiding doing, the simple act of committing to five minutes of intentional work moves your energy forward. The time is short enough to direct your attention towards getting something done.

You build momentum and break the resistance by time blocking the event. This is a clearly defined time block when you work on a specific goal. Your time block is specifically targeting one action task.

As Gary Keller explains in his book, The One Thing:

"Time blocking is a very results-oriented way of viewing and using time. It's a way of making sure that what has to be done gets done."

The goal with this strategy isn't to finish your difficult task, but to overcome the biggest hurdle of doing anything—starting it.

Everything that you (and I) have always avoided has never been time blocked. I can say this with confidence because if it had been time blocked, it would not have been a hard thing unfinished but a hard thing completed.

You want to move all your hard things not finished over to the right side of the hard things now completed list. Only then can you look at your progress and say, “It got done because I did something about it!”

Five minutes is a short block of time, but it starts you working on the one thing you are avoiding. 80% of the hard work for doing hard things is always in the beginning. The resistance doesn’t come from doing the task but from thinking about doing the task.

You build up resistance in your mind that diverts energy away from taking intentional action.

Taking deliberate action NOW motivates and energizes you. It fills you with a sense of accomplishment: “I’ve started this thing I was always afraid to do!”

Don’t think about what happens after five minutes. Block it in and start working.

After meditation and deep breathing exercises, I begin every morning with a five-minute block of work. The night before, I decide what I’m going to work on, and then I work on it from the beginning of my workday.

You don’t have to set any fancy alarms with your phone. Your mind knows what five minutes feels like. Sit down and do it. Write your intention down on paper. You can write it down five times as in the previous step.

Protect your five-minute time block, but don’t stop after five minutes if you want to keep going. The purpose is to get moving on your task, to build momentum and confidence. To start the difficult thing, break the resistance keeping you stuck that tells you “It’ll get done someday”, and then weeks or months later, you’re still thinking about it.

If you’re thinking about doing it but not doing it, it’s not getting done. I train my mind every day to stop thinking about tasks I must do, have to do, should do. I decide I’m doing it. I block off five minutes, and I do it. No complaining, no fear. I simply begin.

The most difficult step in doing anything is always taking the first action. The first step can be the easiest to take if you decide what it is. Make this step intentional.

Do it now. If not now, when?

There is no more “later.” You have this day only. Later is your mind putting off what can be done now. Five minutes of your time is all that is necessary.

Implementation Task:

“You don’t have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Step 6: Tell Someone

(You're Doing It)

"You may delay, but time will not."

— Benjamin Franklin

The reason that elite performers, CEOs, artists and high-level entrepreneurs hire mentors and coaches is:

Accountability.

In a recent podcast interview with Tim Ferriss, the world-acclaimed Wolverine actor Hugh Jackman said that he has a personal coach. He sends this coach a message at the end of each day about the tasks he accomplished —or failed to accomplish—and, if something on his action list isn't done, his coach walks him through the reasons he couldn't hit his mark.

If Hugh Jackman needs someone to stay accountable for his actions and goals, what is stopping you and me?

By sharing your goals and progress with another person who is holding you true to your promise, you will develop a sense of urgency. It's easy to break the rules we set for ourselves, but the most disciplined and focused elite

achievers get that way because they have help. They have accountability partners.

When you work with an accountability partner—coach or mentor—you take the burden off pressuring yourself. You just do it, or they call you out. We don't always take intentional action for ourselves, but we will do it for someone else.

Accountability Counts

If you're not accountable to someone, you're accountable to nobody. I don't know about you but, if I'm only accountable to myself, it's becomes too easy to brush it off. There are no reprimands because I'll go easy on myself and fall back on the excuses that start the avoidance cycle spinning again:

"It's no big deal. I'll get to it tomorrow."

"Maybe I just need to extend the timeframe."

"Nobody cares what I do, anyway? I can take my time with this."

Sound familiar?

Accountability for avoidance seekers is crucial.

Knowing you have to check in with someone is a key motivator for putting in the work. Even if you didn't finish, you put in an hour and you almost succeeded.

But finishing tasks can be a struggle if you are in the habit of building half-bridges. Accountability identifies the tasks needed to complete the job/work.

When you are accountable to a friend, coach or business partner, you are expected to answer for not only the results you achieve, but the actions you take to get there.

Accountability is the key to achieving goals. It will be your biggest driver on days when you "just don't feel like doing it." There will be many days like this. You could wake up with the best intentions but by lunch, it all falls apart.

Accountability works for several reasons:

Do Hard Things First… with an Accountability Partner!

Who can I find to hold me accountable? It can be anyone, but preferably, it should be someone who will not let you off the hook easily. I work with people who partnered with people online in mastermind communities. Alternatively, you can work with spouses and partners.

Who you are accountable to is not as important, so long as they are there to help you reach the milestone(s).

One big reason I failed to do hard things is because I never had accountability. If I succeeded, great, I could give myself a reward, but if I didn't, that was also okay, because nobody was telling me to "do it and stop putting it off!" Therefore, self-accountability rarely works in the long run. It's difficult to be hard on yourself when you're trapped in your own mind!

Implementation Task:

Ask your business partner, friend, or a member in a mastermind group to be your accountability buddy. This can be a once a day check in or at the end of the week. Once accountability is established, decide on a regular time of day to check in. This can be a simple text message but serves to prompt you to get your win for the day.

Side note: I know many people who are hesitant to be accountable to anyone for fear of letting that person down. Do not let the fear of failure hold you back! You are brave just for reading this book, so sign up an accountability partner and rack up your wins.

"When we fail to set boundaries and hold people accountable, we feel used and mistreated. So we sometimes attack who they are, which is far more hurtful than addressing a behavior or a choice."

— Brené Brown, bestselling author of

The Gifts of Imperfection

Step 7: Put it On Your Calendar

"To the degree we're not living our dreams; our comfort zone has more control of us than we have over ourselves."

— Peter McWilliams

There is a reason calendars exist, and it's not just to track the date or write down dentist appointments. When it comes to doing hard things, you need to set a definitive hard line for finishing. Personally, I don't like to refer to completion dates as "deadlines", since it sounds scary.

Whatever you decide to call it, your hard thing to do today or this week must be on your calendar. This is in addition to writing it down five times. In fact, I write it down five times first, and then immediately assign a completion date to it. This works for two reasons.

I have a long list of difficult things I have never finished because they had no deadlines.

Everything I've ever completed had an assigned completion date written on my calendar hanging above the desk.

As bestselling New York Times author of Dream Big Bob Goff has said, "The battle for happiness begins on the pages of our calendars."

Your calendar matters. Putting priority tasks on your calendar with key priorities is how you design a life that feels authentic, fulfilling, and satisfying.

I am a fan of making lists, but a list isn't the only thing you need. There are multiple steps in this process to ensure your success, and a calendar is your best friend when it comes to commitment. You can create this in a day planner or hang a calendar on the wall. I do both. I also plug it into my phone and computer alerts for additional reinforcement. This goes in hand with time blocking.

When you time block it into your schedule, you are committing to a specific time in the day for this task. Marking the task on your calendar means that it is being worked on today and you will have it completed by this date.

I recommend you implement the Don't Break the Chain Method.

Jerry Seinfeld had a system for tracking his writing. He dedicated each day to writing jokes and comedy, and when he did, he marked it down on the calendar with an X. Done. He'd keep the calendar visible, and at the end of the week or month, he could see the progress made through keeping the habit.

To illustrate, if you are working on a challenging task that takes one week to complete, by time-blocking it in one hour a day, you won't forget to do it. If it's written down or scheduled in your digital calendar and it still doesn't get done, look at the reason why. Be totally honest with yourself. Did you intentionally avoid doing it, or did something else come up that prevented you from doing it?

This personal accountability is effective because it builds pressure to work on it. Besides, the last person you want to disappoint is yourself!

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Implementation Task:

Get yourself a wall calendar—the bigger, the better. Then, identify your priority task for that day or week. When you work on your task, place an X on that day. The goal is not to break the chain. If you do, the next day you double down to get it done. It was much harder for me to just skip a day when I could see the progress being made—or not being made. You can share this data with your accountability partner.

Give yourself enough time to complete the task. For example, I had to purge a closet I hadn't cleaned in years. This was one of my hard to do items (not a priority, but it's on my list), so I assigned three hours to do it. Working on it for thirty minutes a day (which is the limit of my decluttering tolerance), I finished in about a week—one day ahead of the intended target date.

If this had not been on my calendar with an X marked down leading up to the completed task, I'd still be looking for a new space to throw the clutter.

"Your Life Is Happening Right Now: Don't let procrastination take over your life. Be brave and take risks. Your life is happening right now."

— Roy T. Bennett

Step 8: Visualize Doing the Hard Thing First

"You don't need a new plan for next year. You need a commitment."

— Seth Godin

The habit of putting off hard things begins with your illusion. The very thing you're putting off is somehow going to get done later.

In the moment of your decision to procrastinate, your imagination is living in the future when it idolizes you as the future action taker who is going to accomplish the task. As we have learned, this rarely happens.

The Art of Creative Visualization

Creative visualization is a form of meditation. It is the art of using mental imagery and affirmation to produce positive changes in your life. By visualizing the tasks as if you are now working on them, you can trick your mind into believing action is being taken.

In her ground-breaking book, Creative Visualization, Shakti Gawain says:

"We always attract into our lives whatever we think about most, believe in most strongly, expect on the deepest level, and imagine most vividly."

Research has proven that athletes training for the Olympics prepare for the sport both on the field and off. According to researchers Ellen Rogin and Lisa Kueng, it's not only the physical training that affects an athlete's success, but the mental training, in the form of visualization.

Athletes who commit to visualizing themselves succeeding will mentally create success in their mind first.

With visual imagery, athletes will mentally rehearse training as if watching it happen from a spectator's view. By implementing this visual imagery, world-class athletes can achieve their dreams and improve their actual/physical performance.

According to Jack Canfield, author of The Success Principles:

"The practice has even given some high achievers what seems like super-powers, helping them create their dream lives by accomplishing one goal or task at a time with hyper focus and complete confidence. Elite athletes use it. The super-rich use it. And peak performers in all fields now use it. That power is called visualization."

Now, what could you do if you committed to just ten minutes a day of visualization? What goals could you achieve? What hard things could you complete in a single afternoon, or in the next twenty minutes?

This is the practice I used to get through all the hard things in life. I resist almost everything until I visualize the process and steps of actually doing it. When this happens, it shifts my subconscious from action paralysis to action taker. I can see myself working with determination.

Think of visualization as the key to the door that unlocks everything. With visualization, you pay attention to all the details that help you achieve your goal.

By visualizing it, you can eliminate the errors you would otherwise make during the process. This could be something you hadn’t thought of. Thinking is powerful. Putting yourself in a situation through visual rehearsal is building the process before you do anything physical.

For breaking your internal procrastinator, visualization becomes the primary weapon that tears away fear. As a result, your resistance is shattered, and you begin to feel hopeful rather than hopeless.

First you imagine it, and then you do it. Mental rehearsal positions you for success. You know it’s going to happen.

Your brain doesn’t recognize the difference between what is happening in your imagination and the physical act of doing it.

Visualization activates the creative powers of the subconscious mind, motivating it to work harder at creating solutions. Using visualization, you’ll experience new levels of motivation and find yourself doing hard things that you would normally avoid.

Implementation Task:

Schedule a fifteen-minute session in the morning for visualizing the life you want to build. Use the process as it is laid out below. Take an image of your hardest task and visualize working on this one thing.

For the next few days, continue to visualize yourself hacking away at the steps required to complete the work. By doing this, you are conditioning your mind to work on it.

Here is how to visualize:

Take a difficult task from your list of hard things to do.

Block off fifteen minutes for this exercise. You can set a timer. I recommend using the digital app Be Focused Pro.

Get comfortable and you can begin. Imagine the first step towards doing this hard thing. Let's use an example. You must clean out the car. It hasn't been cleaned in months, and every time you look at it, you feel guilty. What is the first thing you do?

Rehearse the first step. This is all about getting started. The hardest block is the first. The reason we get nothing done is that we don't actually begin. Visualize taking the first step towards this.

Visualize yourself watching a motion picture. As you can see yourself in your own movie, doing something you haven't done yet, this links your brain to the event.

Visualize it first, and then get busy doing it!

"Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare."

— Petr Ludwig, author of

The End of Procrastination

Step 9: Close Your Open Loops

"Focus on being productive

instead of busy."

— Tim Ferriss

Years ago, I worked for a company that, every Friday one hour before everyone clocked out, all employees had to stop what they were doing and spend the time closing loops.

The manager, a person of high-level productivity, had a consistent habit at the end of the day. He would spend 30-45 minutes reviewing items on his goals and task list he had yet to finish. He said that open loops created stress and build up residual anxiety over time.

The question he asked was, "Do you want to spend the rest of your weekend thinking about the one email you could have finished, the one paper you didn't file, or the form you should have submitted by its due date?"

He was right. If I left the office with an open loop (an unfinished task), it would sit on my mind all weekend. Being a recovering procrastinator, I would catch myself falling into the, "I'll do it first thing Monday" trap.

On Friday, I had to ask myself, "Will Monday morning be better than today? Can I guarantee that I'll arrive at the office and have one hour free to work

on this?”

It’s a disaster to think next week will give you more time than the present moment. I have a strategy for defeating this. I visualize arriving at work next week, fully intending to finish my already overdue critical task, and getting slammed with so much work that I can’t finish what I could have done today.

The stress. The pressure. The pain. That is what waits for me on Monday if I decide to delay this today.

That night, I started making a list of all the open loops in my life—at work and at home—and I pinned this list to my wall. It had to be visible. Remember, I was dealing with a mind that would rather ignore the hard stuff.

By writing it down and placing the note in front of you, it’s hard to turn away. Writing it down in a notebook is great but, you’ll end up closing the notebook and conveniently throw it to the side.

Out of sight, out of mind.

You need to hold yourself accountable to the open loop list. You could have twenty items on the list, but how many you have isn’t important. What matters is, you know what they are, and you can work on your open loop list one item at a time.

One bad habit I developed was starting things and never finishing. I would start a project, get halfway through, and start another one. I would begin one thing, stop after a few minutes or halfway, and start another. Trouble was, I still had to remember the thing I started so I could go back and finish it. This

is an exhausting way to live and work. You fatigue out and eventually burn out.

Open loops keep you wired to the past. They keep you under constant stress and strain as the guilt of all these incompletes weighs heavily on your subconscious.

Right now, think about three things you have never finished. How do you feel?

By closing your loops, you decrease your stress, raise your confidence, and take control of your mind.

By closing one loop, it pushes you further to work on another one. When you conquer one small hill, ask yourself, “Okay, I know now I can do this. What’s next?”

Every step forward leads to another step forward. As the ancient Chinese philosopher and writer Lao Tsu said, “Every journey begins with the first step.”

Every step taken leads to another step and eventually, you’ll have conquered so many milestones that you begin to question what was holding you back to begin with.

Implementation Task:

Take an open loop task and leave fifteen minutes at the end of the day to finish it. If it takes longer, start earlier or extend your workday to complete it.

You can use the skills already discussed to begin now. Block in the time, write the task down, and commit to doing it by adding it to your calendar.

Make a commitment to yourself now to get it done.

"The really happy people are those who have broken the chains of procrastination, those who find satisfaction in doing the job at hand. They're full of eagerness, zest, productivity. You can be, too."

— Norman Vincent Peale, Author of

The Power of Positive Thinking

Step 10: Prioritize Your Daily #1 Item

"The key is not to prioritize what's on your schedule, but to schedule your priorities."

— Stephen Covey, Author of The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People

By staying grounded in the immediate moment and working on your hard tasks now, it makes your future moments a better place to lean into.

In Gary Keller's ground-breaking book, The One Thing, he states:

"The truth about success is that our ability to achieve extraordinary results in the future lies in stringing together powerful moments, one after the other. What you do at any given moment determines what you experience in the next. Your "present now" and all "future nows" are undeniably determined by the priority you live in the moment. The deciding factor in determining how you set that priority is who wins the battle between your present and future selves."

As Keller states, it is about building priority into your actions. Until your hard thing is a priority, it will remain a to-do list item. You will get around to it when you're ready, and that could be anytime between now and the next five years. You don't need ten #1 priorities on your list today.

You only need one. One thing to do. One task to focus on. One path to direct your focus into.

When you decide to prioritize only one task, you say no to all the rest. When you have more than one task on your list, you say yes to five different tasks and they will all fight for your attention at the same time. By default, you won't do the most important work on that list, but the easiest thing that is usually not a priority.

I begin my day with one task on one sticky note posted to my desk with nothing else. If there is anything else in my field of vision—checklists, mental notes—I clear them away. The less my attention is pulled away by external distractions, the faster I can work.

When you complete this task, take it off the list and move to the next priority item. If your #1 priority is a daily habit that moves you closer to your big goal, you can build this in as a non-negotiable task to work on first thing in the morning.

Your priority is not a "could-do" or a "want-to-do" item on your list. To illustrate, let's take a real-life scenario.

A friend of mine lost his job during the Covid pandemic. He decided to build his business online, completely virtual. His only income was government relief, which wouldn't last forever. He gave himself six months to get his new business up and going.

How did he do this?

The project became his only mission. He would awaken every day with a clear set of goals. Many things he told me later were very difficult. Many

tasks he wanted to avoid. But he continued to show up every day and put in the time, get a few wins, and in time, the momentum took over. Nine months later, he had replaced his full-time income. Not only this, but he loved what he was doing.

He remembers the initial resistance:

"There were days I wanted to pack it in. I thought, 'I'll try to find another job, even though it isn't what I want.'"

He ignored the fear which was telling him failure was imminent. Instead, he followed intuition, did the hard things and achieved success by making them a priority.

Here is a process for staying on track with your #1 priority task:

Visualize the loss of not succeeding. This leads back to our discussion of immediate gains. If you sacrifice the hard work now for pleasure instead, the result will be pain.

Observe your mind as it seeks to escape. The shiny object habit is easy to latch onto. When you chase something else, it takes your attention away from the thing you should have been pursuing.

When you flip to another tab on your computer, or you suddenly need to check your bank balance for the third time that day, ask yourself:

"What does this have to do with my present task?"

In most cases, nothing. It is just a fleeting, random thought that you can control. The moment you decide to pursue a distraction, you are letting your mind control your actions.

To do hard things first, your priority must be intentional. This is action leading action. First, you decide to take the first action. This intentional action leads to another action. You create a chain of priority actions with each small action linked to the next.

If you break away from your task and do something completely unrelated, you break the priority attached to this task. Your “other thing” interrupts the pattern. Now, it takes ages to get back on track, assuming you get back on track.

I write my priority on a sticky note and carry it with me. You can tack it in front of your workstation. Make it visible. Make what you’re focusing on crystal clear.

If I’m working on this task and suddenly do something else, I wondered off the trail (I’ve broken the chain). Realizing this, I now have a choice:

Will I continue to head down this other path or reverse engines and return to the priority work?

Implementation Task:

Use a sticky note (or index card) to write down your priority task for tomorrow. Post it in a visible spot. (I write my #1 task on three separate sticky notes. I place one on my computer screen, one on my wall calendar, and one inside the physical scheduler.) Make it impossible to miss. If it’s

written in a notebook, as soon as you close that notebook, you will move onto something else.

As an additional backup, set your Google calendar to send you a reminder at the end of each day. All of this should be done in the evening as you wind down and prepare for the next day. Don’t wait until the morning if you can do it the night before.

When you wake up and get into your workflow, you want this to be the first thing to tackle.

Action Task Recap:

Write down your #1 priority on three sticky notes.

Paste these in the three places you are always working.

Set up a calendar reminder or alarm for personal accountability.

At the end of each working day, check in with your accountability partner to stay accountable for completing your #1 priority task.

“Sometimes you’ve such a large to-do-list that procrastination seems the only sensible option.”

— Peter McGuire

Step 11: Train Your Brain to Interrupt Sudden “Impulse Snaps”

"Becoming is better than being."

— Carol Dweck

On your way to procrastination recovery, there is one tripwire that you must be aware of. Most likely you already know it happens, but you haven’t yet put a label on it.

Here is what happens. You are finally in a state of flow—or getting close—and writing that next best song that will go viral as soon as you get it recorded. Just a few hours of practice and then…

Halfway through your work session your brain gets an idea. Let’s take a break!

So, you leave your unfinished work behind and take a ten-minute break. You don’t remember exactly what happened but, one hour later, you’re still coasting on the Internet, checking out other musicians and comparing their exceptional music to the crap you are writing. And it really is garbage, I mean who would listen to such…

And the mind takes over the conversation, filling your head with enough doubt to paralyze a real elephant. You can’t go back to work now. You need

creative time. So you start randomly recording YouTube videos, and watching more how-to lessons on how to be this and that, and somehow you ended up on watching a documentary on Gandhi.

Not going well. To break the decline of your day, you end it with 30 minutes of email, responding haphazardly to twenty-eight messages that only took one hour. Now for cat videos…

Okay, so at this stage we realize that, if this is you in the story, there isn't going to be a happy ending. But sadly, I have personally spent years of my working life this way, getting into something and as I near completion, my brain says, "Hey, let's not finish just yet. It's break time!" and off we go. Until noon, and then tomorrow, and break leads into the weekend.

This chain of events is what happens when the brain goes through impulse snaps. Sudden, random thoughts to go do something even if you're in the middle of another thing. Thinking the sudden thought must be urgent to intrude so rapidly, naturally you take a peek. But one look and you're hooked. Now you're chasing a rabbit down a hole that it knows too well, and you don't. New to the game, you play along.

The chase is on. And the procrastinator's mind loves a good chase. Down we go, chasing all the endless trails of bookmarked tabs, ideas that stack one on top of the other, and half-built bridges that stay that way.

How to Break Impulse Snaps

Impulse snaps are like the links in a chain that have been strengthened over the years. This is why most procrastinators are prone to multi-tasking, a condition that funnels the mind into doing what it isn't meant to do… jump from task to task every five minutes when it gets bored.

One way to help yourself resist the desire to engage in impulsive behaviors, such as procrastination, is to add a brief delay before you indulge yourself.

For example, if you want to check your phone for notifications, count to 5 before reacting. You want to jump to another tab on your computer because 30+ are open in your browser, count to five… and then close 29 of those tabs except for the one you're using. You want to check the fridge again for the second time in an hour, sit still and count to ten. Resist the urge to react.

When you respond to the first impulse snap (I'm checking Facebook!), you condition the mind to react to the urgency of the sudden thought. Remember: Just because you have a sudden thought about something, doesn't mean you should or must react to it. Take a moment to think about the thought.

We have over 50,000 thoughts a day. Many of these will be detrimental to improving your behavior or habits, unless you interrupt the sudden urgency to run away and check something. Our mission here is to curb the instant gratification monster that wants to break out of the closet. Keep that monster locked away and it will eventually grow quiet.

For now, the best action you can take is to notice these impulse snaps when they happen… and they probably happen a lot! I started counting how many times in an hour I would get the sudden urge to jump away from what I was working on, and my record at its peak was 47x. That is almost once a minute. I wasn't only feeding into a bad multi-tasking habit, but had created a wall between my reality and task avoidance.

Over the months to come, I continued to count these impulse snaps. Eventually, I had the number down to 7x per hour. My level of concentration became laser-focused.

Breathing is powerful because it puts you in touch with the present moment. Observe yourself sitting there and continue breathing in deeply. Do this whenever you catch your mind trying to escape down a rabbit hole. This usually happens when you must confront a task or situation that you don't want to deal with.

The truth about hard things is that the resistance is strongest in the initial few moments. But as soon as you calm your mind and focus on taking deep breaths, the more relaxed you settle into the work and task at hand. It's the initial impulse to bolt and hide that begins the procrastination cycle.

Stay where you are.

Breathe in and hold your breath for five seconds. Exhale for five. Practice this as you work, as you think, and make breathing a part of your regular self-therapy.

Implementation task:

Add a delay before indulging your impulses. When you get the sudden urge to take off and start checking something, count to five. Then count to ten.

Breath in deeply. Practice the breathing habit as you work. When you're walking. Driving the car. In moments of stress.

To get a handle on impulse snaps, it helps to count the frequency by taking score.

Keep a notepad next to your side and, when you have the sudden urge to jump onto another task, breathe and count to five. Mark that as one. The key

is to keep score when you can delay this. Over the days and weeks to come, as you build better awareness, your impulse snaps will decrease.

"The only difference between success and failure is the ability to take action."

— Alexander Graham Bell

Step 12: Automate Repetitive Tasks

"Often just by taking action, by doing something about the situation can relieve the stress and help

correct the situation."

— Catherine Pulsifer

One thing many people fail to do is to save money. For years, this was always one of those hard things that I would get around to doing. And when you have a "get around to doing it someday" item on your list, can you guess when it gets done? Never. Or when you do, it's much later than you intended.

Back in my college days, I read a book called The Wealthy Barber by David Chilton. In the book, one strategy of the wealthy barber is to pay yourself first, approximately 10% of your savings. Now, this is not new information, and we have all heard this before: Pay Yourself First. But how many people actually do it?

When I first started saving 10% of my salary, I would stash it away manually. Moving it from one account to the next. This is a lot of work and, if I had a month where I forgot—or found something better to do with the money—I dodged it. And it gets easier the next month to skip it too.

So, I set up a system with the bank to take it from one account and automatically transfer it into a savings account. If you work for a company

that does this already by matching your savings, perfect.

But, let’s apply this to everything else. Using the same principles of automation, when creating your list of all the things you have been putting off, how many of these items can be just a one-off task.

From your list, what can be automated monthly? What do you need a process for?

Let’s discuss automation vs. your process.

If you automate a task, you are delegating it to someone, or relying on software or technology to automate it so you don’t have to think about it. On the other hand, your process is the action step you need to take to make it as smooth as possible.

Here is an example of a process:

Saving and filing receipts for tax returns at the end of the tax year. Do you ever get to tax season and realize you forgot to save most of your receipts? So now you have to spend hours either looking for them or trying to locate the receipts online if you spent the money digitally.

Most of my business is online purchases, so the receipts I have are stored in PayPal or with the company servers. But if I forget to merge these bills, they get lost, or I just forget about them.

How can I automate this or create a process to make it less overwhelming?

From here, I make a decision. I hire an assistant to do this. Or I schedule the time to do this. My process is to schedule fifteen minutes at the end of the workday to review all my purchases and sales.

Then, I can move the receipts into designated folders. Done.

This process means I don’t have to worry about it at the end of the year. Trust me, without a system to track your payments, you will panic to complete your tax returns when you have no time.

This is one of those hard things that must be done. You might have an uncommon situation but regardless of what it is, always ask yourself:

How can I automate this to save time?

With a process built for repetitive tasks, you can perform the activity seamlessly. Let it become your “recipe” for success. You can do this with email, finances, and project workflow. If you can’t automate the process and let it run on its own, you can automate the process and build it into your system.

I think the key reason we procrastinate to do hard things is because we are not clear how easy it can be to do one (automate) or the other (create a process). When you know that this can be performed on autopilot, and you do set it up for yourself, it removes the stress and overwhelm associated with fitting this into your structure.

Implementation Task:

Automate Your Repetitive Tasks

If this is a one-and-done task, you know if you dedicate (X) number of hours to your task, it's off your list. Boom! For instance, filling out a form for your passport takes the most effort the first time. But after that, you only have to renew it in 5-10 years (this varies by country).

After that, you can set up a reminder to be emailed to you when you must take intentional action next. These days, many companies and organizations have a process for everything. It's just a matter of plugging in and the system takes care of it.

Make a list of your repetitive tasks. Can you automate any of them? If so, is there any technology that can save you valuable time each week? Nowadays, we are immersed in the world of apps and software, all of which are fighting for attention.

Here are five automation apps I can recommend that will make your life flow easier:

Monday.com

IFTTT

todoist.com

Trello.com

Taskworld.com

"One way to boost our will power and focus is to manage our distractions instead of letting them manage us."

— Daniel Goleman, bestselling author of Focus: The Hidden Driver to Excellence

You Learn More from Failure Than from Success. Don’t Let It Stop You. Failure Builds Character.

Step 13: Delegate Tasks You Don’t Want to Do (or can’t do)

“Anything worth putting off is worth abandoning altogether.”

– Epictetus

There are two primary reasons you delay taking action:

You don’t want to do it.

You can’t do it

One core reason you might avoid doing something is because you don’t know how to do it. There is nothing to be ashamed of here. Nobody can do everything, and that is why we need help. Look at the list you made and ask yourself:

What is on this list that I need help with?

When I make my “hard tasks” list, one of the first things I do is ask myself this one question:

“What do I need help with?”

I’ll mark this task in red, circle it, or place a symbol next to it.

Then, I’ll ask:

“Why do I need help with this? What is the specific area of this task that I need help?”

It could be a tech-related issue, or a skill set that you don’t have. Are you going to learn this skill set so you can do it yourself, or figure out a piece of tech hardware when you’re trying to keep up with everything else?

From looking at my list of things to do, I determined that I was procrastinating on taking intentional action because I had to reach out for help. And asking for help isn’t always easy. We can delay asking for help that leads to putting off the task indefinitely.

You never get to it because you don’t have time to learn a skill that could take months or years. So, you stay stuck on a hard task that remains on your action list. Eventually, it will be knocked off the list, but over the long term, it could be something that is costing you money, draining energy, or creating hidden paths of stress and anxiety.

Decide what steps you need to take to get this task done. Make a list of these steps. Then, ask yourself:

“Am I doing this, or asking someone to do it?”

It could be a simple process of hiring it out to a freelancer for a few hundred dollars. Or you could approach someone in your office who will help.

Determine the sticking point.

I have started working on many things in my career. When I hit a block and couldn't move forward, by default, I would give it the "later" check. I would move it to the side and start working on something else. This left an indefinite open loop, and open loops are unfinished tasks we are avoiding.

You must figure out what you can do to break the block. If you have to shift it aside for now, set up a reminder to delegate the task. The action to move it forward must be set in motion, even if you can't do it right now. If you're not doing it, someone else is.

Make a list of tasks you can do. Then, make another list of skills or tasks you need help with. When I developed my business website, I knew I could provide content for the site, but I needed help with the design and layout. I could have learned how to do it myself—which would have taken months—or hire help. I opted to outsource it.

It is easier when you can pay someone to do this, but what if you need the help of a friend or colleague at work? What if you're asking this person for their time? Asking isn't always easy. In fact, reaching out could be one reason you are stuck on something. I had several tasks that I couldn't move ahead with until I asked the right person for help.

Here is a process you can use for reaching out to ask for help. I have used this step system for years and it works. You won't always get a YES but asking for help is better than sitting alone trying to figure it out.

Here's the system:

Draft twenty ideas of things to ask for this week. You can also reflect on last week and come up with ideas on things you could have asked for but didn't —chances are they will come up again.

Look at areas of your life that you are terrified to approach. This could be in a relationship or a situation at work. Maybe you can't handle asking people for help no matter what. You fear looking stupid. Note the areas you retreat from.

Then…

Choose one of your fears and focus on it. Think about how you are going to ask for this one thing. Feel the fear as it works its way through you. How will you ask? Who will you ask? When will you ask?

You can make a massive difference in your life by asking the right people for the right things at the right time. Commit to asking for at least one thing you desire each day. This can be something you want for yourself, or better yet, you can help someone else to get something they want.

Nothing happens in life unless you really want it. If you want it, ask for it.

Implementation task:

Review your list of hard to do things. Next to each item, mark it as an automated task, a process or a one-off. Decide the action task that needs to be performed with each item.

If automating something, what steps are needed to set this up? If it's a process, what steps do you follow? If it's a one-off, when do you do it, and how much time will you block in?

What can you delegate? Who has the skills to get this done quickly?

Here is my 6-step process for asking for what you want:

Write down the one thing you really want.

Make a short list of three people who could provide this.

Write down the benefit you are providing by asking them for what you need.

Ask confidently, as if it is already yours.

If it doesn’t turn out the way you wanted, be respectful of their decision.

Finally, let go of your expectations.

“When you say 'Yes' to others, make sure you are not saying 'No' to yourself."

— Paulo Cohelo, bestselling author of The Alchemist

Step 14: Identify Your Constraints (Bottlenecks)

"Surviving a failure gives you more self-confidence. Failures are great learning tools. But they must be kept to a minimum."

— Jeffrey Immelt

Every journey has its challenges. These are the obstacles and roadblocks that challenge your resolve. These are called constraints, and there are two kinds of constraints in your path: External constraints and challenges—the external events you can't control, but you have to react to.

Internal constraints—which can influence, but your internal constraints are the most difficult to defeat.

You avoid doing hard things for a reason. If that reason is grounded in fear, you remain stuck in action paralysis. We fall into a pattern of taking the path of least resistance because it's easy. But the easy way can quickly become the hard way if you focus on self-defeating constraints.

Begin by asking yourself related questions to the roadblocks. There will always be challenges to overcome. You are not limited by the constraints, but by failing to identity the limiting factor.

Here are critical questions to prompt self-discovery and start you thinking about the core issues in your path:

What is the one thing I fear about this obstacle?

Is it related to technology? If yes, what is the fear of technology? Recording a video? Setting it up? Looking foolish on camera? (Note: Everyone feels this way. Other people make it look easy because they've practiced so many times. Start with 2-5 minutes of recording yourself on camera.)

What could happen if I take intentional action right now? (Hint: By not taking massive action, nothing happens, and you stay the same. So, what is the worst that can happen?)

Is there someone I need to ask for help, and I am resisting from approaching this person? If yes, is it the fear of rejection? Am I embarrassed to ask for help? (Reminder: Everybody needs help. Ask, and you will eventually find the right person to help you.)

After you identify your constraint, ask yourself, "Is this something I should do, or can I hire someone? Can I ask someone to help?"

The speed with which you succeed is determined by identifying and tackling the choke points in your life and business. There are no exceptions. Constraints exist in every organization, and they affect us all. There is never a straight line to success.

In a previous company I worked in, sales had dwindled by 60%, but the market was in good shape. The company had been focused on finding external constraints as the cause of the problem, but after shifting focus to identifying internal constraints as the root cause, they identified several determining factors. The company executives set out to remove the constraints related to the sales and marketing side of the business, and within three months, sales had increased by 130%.

When you identify the constraint, you can work towards removing the problem area. There will always be something holding you back, but you need to hack away at it until you move faster.

If you notice that one of your tasks is a bottleneck and that you're procrastinating on it, it can be advantageous to clear it out of the way.

Here are several ways you can do this:

Just get it done. This is obviously the best course of action, and might be doable if you use some of the other strategies which are available in this guide. However, if you find that you're still stuck on the bottleneck after a while, it's better to use a different approach instead.

Delegate the task. You might be able to delegate a difficult or time-intensive task to someone who will be able to handle it for you. This person could have better skills at handling the work. I outsource 60% of my work because I simply can't do it all.

Eliminate the task. You might decide that a certain task isn't that important to do, and that you can delete it from your to-do list entirely.

Implementation Tasks:

Identify Your #1 Constraint or Bottleneck. Nothing worth having will be easy. And the more you want it, the harder it will be to get.

What obstacles are holding you back from achieving your dream? Is it a lack of time, inattentive focus, or a disorganized work structure?

Eventually, you will identify the obstacles that are in your way, and by recognizing your constraints, you can work towards removing them for improved productivity, efficiency and better workflow.

"What matters is this: being fearless of failure arms you to break the rules. In doing so, you may change the culture and just possibly, for a moment, change life itself."

— Malcolm Mclaren

Step 15: Begin with One Small Action

"If you can't fly then run, if you can't run then walk, if you can't walk then crawl, but whatever you do you have to keep moving forward."

— Martin Luther King Jr.

Small actions compounded over time lead to big wins. One reason you allow procrastination to take over is your fixation on the big win that requires lots of work and a dedicated time block. It could take weeks or months to finish an extensive project, but when you count the small wins, it builds momentum faster.

Start with small steps and build momentum. Soon, your consistent actions will reveal what you can accomplish when you take small steps consistently.

You want to lose weight? Don't go cold turkey on junk food, stop eating at fast-food restaurants, and avoid all-you-can-eat restaurants all in the same week. Gradually, cut back and take small actions instead of the one massive, "I will do it all this week" approach. Habits form after months of practice until they become routine.

You want to get into the best shape of your life? Start by doing some simple exercises at home. Start with five push-ups. Add one more push-up each day for thirty days. Now you're doing over thirty-five push-ups in a single session.

Writing a book or starting a blog to expand your reach? Begin with one page. The first sentence. Sit down at the computer. Type in the first word. You can always chunk the process down to the absolute tiniest step imaginable. I have had to do this with bigger projects that I built a heavy resistance to. The stronger the resistance, the smaller the action step is needed to overcome the inertia. Sometimes it was something as simple as typing a search term into Google.

Constantly ask yourself, “What is the next immediate step I can take to keep moving forward.” Then, take that step. Whatever it takes to hit your big goal, you can always begin with the absolute minimum step necessary.

You want to save $2000 this year? Start by putting away $3.00 a day.

You want to learn a language? Learn five extra words a day.

I learned to speak conversational Japanese in five years. I hadn’t mastered the language at this point, but I was able to make significant strides that most non-native speakers struggled with.

I started with a list of basic words when I arrived. Every week, I would add 20-30 words to my vocabulary by learning five words a day. From that, I could form simple sentences. I would move from learning simple vocabulary per week to making simple sentences. Over time, this developed the skill of fluency.

But it always begins with taking consistent action daily.

Keep a journal of your small wins. Every day you can make a note of the small tasks you completed. Imagine where you’ll be one month, three

months and one year later. But always stay fixed on the smallest task.

Breaking it down into bite-sized chunks is manageable. People get stuck when they try to do too much too soon. This leads to multi-tasking, and multitasking leads to zero progress made.

Your goal is progress, and not perfection.

A new home is built by laying one brick at a time. A car is put together one part at a time. Everything—no matter how complex—begins with that one small piece of the machine being built.

One day at a time. One step at a time. Do the hard things in stages. This is the way you trained your brain to procrastinate in the first place.

Whatever you want to do this year, it is possible, but you need to avoid the hardline approach that it must be all done today. Gradual progress over an extended period is far better than massive progress in a short amount of time and burning yourself out.

Every outstanding achievement in your life will result from taking these small and incremental steps over the days, months, and years to come. This is what “instant success” really is:

Small actions taken consistently over many years.

The time to start is today. You don’t have to wait for everything to be perfect before you start. What is your goal for this year? What do you really want more than anything?

Implementation Task:

Here are four simple steps you can take right now:

Write down your #1 goal for this year. If this is overwhelming, what is your goal for the next thirty days? You want to take intentional action towards this goal, even if it is an action that takes you less than 2 minutes to do.

For the next five minutes, make a list of all the small, manageable action steps related to this goal. Write everything down. Is it an email you have to send or an app you have to download? Is it a chapter in a book you should read?

Build up your momentum over the weeks and months ahead. Looking back six months from now, you'll feel like a mountaineer, looking down from the mountain you have just ascended… one step at a time.

Now, take the simplest step possible on your list. Do this task right now.

"The best way to stop a bad habit is to

never begin it."

— J.C. Penney

Step 16: Adopt The 80/20 Principle

"Think of your priorities not in terms of what activities you do, but when you do them.

Timing is everything."

— Dan Millman

The 80/20 principal was first introduced by the Italian economist, Vilfredo Pareto. To put it simply, the 80/20 principle states:

"80% of your results often come from 20% of your efforts."

For filtering out tasks we must do, the law of 80/20 is critical. Think about the time you have in one day: 24 hours. That is eight hours for sleeping, one hour for eating, and 8-10 hours for work. You might have about 4-5 hours of relaxation and relationship building. How many of your time commitments are in 80/20?

Speaking from experience, I spent years struggling with the 80/20 Principle. Too many projects, loads of checklists and to-do-lists, and everything that blinked or beeped pulled my attention in another direction.

But the problem was identified by my business partner, who noticed the habits I engaged in comprised mostly reactive urgencies. I was always looking to respond to an email as soon as it came through. I'd jump onto a

phone call as soon as someone needed it. I favored the easy and quick win, even if it meant ignoring work that mattered.

When you do what is easy and ignore the difficult tasks, it leads to a pattern of procrastination as you wire your brain to respond to urgency.

As it turns out, procrastination is my Achilles Heel and, until I could recognize it as the one thing holding me back, I continued to repeat this self-defeating cycle. As the 80/20 rule implies, “Your workflow—the tasks you pay attention to—should be focused on creating 80% of your results.”

To break this down, only a small amount of your tasks will produce a tangible result.

When you are sorting out the tasks that bring you the most enjoyment, the greatest success, the highest achievements—the activities that push you to become your best and push past limitations—stay focused on the 20% of tasks that deliver 80% of your results.

No matter how hard you work, it’s not about the volume of hours, it is about the quality of the work you perform. The easy things we default towards when we resist the hard things are about falling into your 80% of wasted time.

80/20 is a measurement of extraordinary results produced through 20% of your actions.

For example:

If you start your day working on simple tasks, you will wire the habit of always starting and working on low-value tasks. By default, this will become

your habit.

80/20 keeps you fixed on the hard thing that must be done now.

Start each day working on your #1 priority. Do it in the first thirty minutes of the day. When you have big dreams, your efforts must be drilled down to the very best ways to spend your time. Your 20% of the day will create 80% of best results.

First, take a sheet of paper—or notebook—and write down your #1 goal. Your goal probably has various steps or tasks needed to achieve it. Write down the first five steps you can think of, then ask yourself:

If I could only accomplish one goal on that list today, which goal would have the greatest impact on results?

Now, write down the second most important goal, take that goal and write it out at the top of another page. The idea is to segment your goals so you can do the next exercise later.

What you'll discover is, after you complete this exercise, you will have determined the top 20% of your goals that will help you to perform at your best, and achieve your dreams faster with less stress and fatigue.

At the beginning of each day, I ask myself:

"Am I working on a task that falls into the top 20%, or the bottom 80%?"

This defining question pulls your awareness into the present. It makes you realize what you do first thing each day. Out of habit, many people start

working on something that leads to nothing. They check email, play with apps, or start by thinking about things tied to the past.

Resist the path of doing small things first. It is the path for shiny objects and worthless, time-wasting tasks. If you waste thirty minutes a day doing meaningless work or checking social media when you get the urge, that amounts to two-and-a-half hours a week, ten hours a month, and 120 hours a year. That is five days spent on bottom level tasks… and that is just thirty minutes spent on this. How about 2-3 hours a day?

The 80/20 principle is more than a productivity tool for efficiency. It will save you a thousand hours each year. Imagine if you are living the last day of your life and someone asked, “Would you like to have one thousand extra hours to live?” What would you say?

Hell yes, I’ll take that.

You have time. Every moment of the day is yours. Work on tasks that fill you with confidence. Do the hard things first—the ones that make you feel great.

Take control of this discipline and, within a few weeks, you will have adapted the 80/20 Principle. You will overcome procrastination the moment you take control of the sequence of tasks that matter most—your 20%—and you gradually do less of the 80% of time and energy wasters.

Implementation Task:

Track the tasks you work on. Ask yourself “is this a 20% or 80% activity?” Draw two circles on paper and in the 20% circle, identify your top three actions.

Is it meditation, writing, or creating a product for your business? In the 80% circle, identify the tasks that are low-value priority. This could be email, playing with your phone, or watching TV (in the middle of the workday).

Now that you can identify the hard-wired tasks you do by default, make a shift to working on your 20%. Commit to spending most of your time in the 20% circle, focusing on what makes 80% of your impact.

"You may have a fresh start any moment you choose, for this thing that we call 'failure' is not the falling down, but the staying down."

— Mary Pickford

Step 17: Schedule a One-Hour Weekly Review Session

"Until you value yourself, you will not value your time. Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it."

— M. Scott Peck, Author of

The Road Less Traveled

Poor planning will always result in a poor return on your efforts. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. All the technology, apps and daily planners we now have at our disposal mean nothing when you fail to schedule your week ahead of time.

The planning habit is the one weekly action you should always build into your system.

In this book, we discussed having a process for doing the hard things. It begins with your plan for the week. Knowing what you're doing ahead of time will put you ahead of the race. The runners in a marathon that wait until the day before to begin training finish last if they finish at all.

As we discussed, blocking in time for doing your hard things at the start of each day requires you to block in one hour a week to plan your week. I've found through trial and error that Sunday afternoon or Friday evening is best for this.

If you work a Monday to Friday schedule, you can plug in the weekly planning session at the end of the workday on Friday while things are still fresh or on Sunday just before you start again. The other option is to carry out a weekly review on Friday and then set up your plan for that week on Sunday.

A weekly schedule is critical for three reasons.

It makes you aware of the distractions. If you know what you should work on, when a distraction finds its way into your workflow, you can recognize it as a time thief and pull back to your priority task.

Eliminates Overwhelm. This condition happens when you get derailed on doing too many tasks leading to multi-tasking and losing time and focus on low priority tasks. Overwhelm will happen less frequently when you plan ahead. If you do experience overwhelm, it's because you're usually doing something that doesn't need your attention.

Schedule your fun stuff. I had a habit of watching television at random times throughout the day. TV for me is a time waster because it isn't critical to my workflow and certainly has nothing to do with defeating procrastination. In fact, watching TV has always been a major contributor to delay tasks I don't want to do.

You can watch TV for hours and think of nothing else when passively focusing on a show, but I enjoy watching movies. I'm not suggesting you must give up watching The Office or GOT if that is what you're into, but like most passive forms of entertainment, be intentional with your rewards.

When planning your week, there are three things that add to the quality of your life. These are your three non-negotiables.

Time with Family: Relationships matter more than anything. These can be difficult to plan because everyone has a schedule that probably doesn't always coincide with yours. So, when I'm not working, I take family and friends time when I can get it.

Exercising and Health. Build an exercise routine into your weekly schedule. All work and no exercise are unhealthy for several reasons.

Exercise releases brain chemicals that make us happy and stimulate brain function. Meditation is powerful for this, too. I recommend thirty minutes of exercise minimum and 15-30 min of meditation.

If your time is tight during the day, you can alternate these two, as I usually do. At the minimum, if I don't exercise, I'll do a fifteen-minute bike ride, regular walking sessions, or fifteen-minutes stretching.

Sleep is the third absolute must-do. Jeff Bezos says he gets eight hours a night. Elon Musk gets seven hours and is an early riser. As research has proven, if you are getting less than six hours sleep, you could shorten your life span by twenty years. You will be less focused and have a greater chance of developing with brain fog (a side effect of lack of sleep).

Start winding down at least one hour before bed. Turn off your devices and your TV. A bad habit is watching TV right up until you crawl into bed. The mindset you go to sleep with is the mindset you will wake up with. You will be less likely to procrastinate with a higher level of focus.

I spend thirty minutes winding down with quiet reflection time, reading, and reviewing my plan for the next day.

To break this down, it is about generating energy. Your brain and body need rest and relaxation to recharge energy. If you feed into bad habits that erode this energy, you will fail to finish important tasks. You will be drained by noon and lethargy will settle in. A loss of willpower at this stage will lead you into doing tasks that are easy and low priority, and the downward spiral begins from here.

This brings us back to the planning cycle. Build in sleep, exercise, communication with friends and family and restoring energy through healthy eating and meditation. There are no shortcuts. When you fail, review what happened and how to course correct for the next day.

Doing the Hard Things First—these represent your big pillars—comes first above all else.

When planning for the week ahead, consider these questions:

How much time do I have?

What obligations am I already committed to this week? (This might include hospital appointments or taking your kids to soccer practice.)

What is my #1 priority project?

What is my #2 priority project?

What is my #3 priority project?

Within each project, what are the three tasks that must be completed?

What is fixed on my schedule? This would be a weekly review session, weekly planning session, exercise, and regular breaks. Structure is critical to success. I worked for years without a proven structure and my productivity suffered as a result.

When identifying blocks or obstacles in your weekly schedule, consider these questions:

What distractions regularly pull me away from my work?

What is the #1 habit that delivers 80% of my results?

What habits make up 80% of my efficiency?

What habits drain my energy?

What tasks are a complete waste of time?

Who can I ask for help or delegate these tasks to?

Once you identify the obstacles and work to eliminate them, you can check in on your performance. You won’t need to ask yourself the same questions every week unless an old habit creeps back in or becomes an issue. When it does, write down the habit, identify the trigger that makes you feed into the habit, and add one strategy for removing this from your schedule.

For example, I was in the habit of filling up on sugar-based sweets at night before bed. You don't have to be a health expert to realize this is a bad idea. It negatively impacts sleep and starts your day off in a bad way. But what triggered this was watching television before bed as a way to wind down.

So, my solution was to remove the TV. I still craved chocolate and ice cream, but the cravings reduced with the TV out of sight. When you have a trigger that trips another negative habit, remove access to the trigger. In my case, it was the TV.

Some people are triggered by social media surfing. If it has a negative impact on your life, it has to go or you will never get things working right. You will be pulled left and right, trying to balance everything.

Daily Review.

A weekly review is your big picture for the week, but you can also do a brief 5-minute review of the day at the end of your day. Review your task list and the top three things that are top priority. There should be only three and no more.

When I made a long checklist of random things to work on, I always failed at getting past the third task. Occasionally I could do four, but three was manageable, and many days, I get only the first two complete.

Ask yourself:

What project am I delaying right now?

Why am I delaying this?

What is the #1 task that, if completed, will impact my career in the long-term?

What inescapable/unavoidable events or appointments are built into my schedule?

Your daily review can be done quickly, and during this session, write down the #1 task for tomorrow. It's highly recommended to know this before you go to bed rather than waking up and making that decision. Your brain will begin working on the problem even as you're sleeping. What you go to bed with is what you wake up with.

Implementation Task:

Block in ten minutes at the end of your workday to do a weekly review of what worked, what you achieved, and what you didn't achieve. Why did you not achieve your #1 priority?

Block in 30-60 minutes at the beginning of your week to do a weekly planning session. This includes a review of your top 3 tasks for the week. Identify potential blocks.

I schedule this on Sunday afternoon (or evening) as the week begins and take one hour to review goals, review tasks that were completed/not completed, and an action plan for the week.

Recommended Resource: Michael Hyatt's Full Focus Planner.

“Procrastination is the lazy cousin of fear. When we feel anxiety about an activity, we

postpone it.”

— Noelle Hancock,

My Year with Eleanor

Step 18: Control Your Distractions (and Manage Shiny Object Syndrome)

"Lack of direction, not lack of time, is the problem. We all have twenty-four hour days."

— Zig Ziglar

You are in a constant struggle to maintain control of your mind. One minute, you are working on your #1 priority. The next minute, you are watching a cat video.

And you don't even like cats.

In the beginning, when I became aware of my addiction to distraction, I created a habit to mark down how often I had a thought to go do something else. To give you an example, I'm writing an article for this week's newsletter. It has to be done end of day because I send it out every Tuesday. It normally takes 2-3 hours to write this article, but before I started tracking my distractions, one article took me three days to complete. Three days! Why?

Attention Disorder. Another term to describe this is Monkey Mind. It is a Buddhist term meaning unsettled, restless, capricious, whimsical, fanciful, inconstant, confused, indecisive, and uncontrollable. In other words, a Monkey Mind is highly prone to becoming distracted by anything and everything.

I call this chasing rabbit trails. It’s also a symptom of Shiny Object Syndrome (SOS).

Shiny Object Syndrome trains your mind to seek out a shiny object that distracts your attention. This could be a course, information, another book, or a social media ad. Meanwhile, as you pursue these things, you leave behind a trail of broken objects (aka unfinished tasks). As we looked at earlier, completing your open loops must be your priority. You have to finish it. If it’s an ongoing project, you must complete the one task within that project.

But what do I do if I suddenly catch myself running down another path? You STOP. Take a STEP BACK. BREATH.

Task switching wears you down fast. Can you imagine what you’ll accomplish with one hour of focused work on a specific task for the next 30 days?

I can tell you what would happen. You’d finish that one thing you’re focused on. There is no great mystery to unlock here. Most of your issues with procrastination stem from the impulse to run in a different direction to the course you should be taking.

You’re always in pursuit of the next best thing. You jump from idea to idea without clarity on what you need or want. You end up wasting time, money and resources.

Eventually, Shiny Object Syndrome (SOS) wears you down. The only thing worse than not having the right information or tools for the job is having too much information and too many tools.

When you show up to build a house, you don’t need five different hammers. Only one good hammer will do!

SOS is a condition of the mind. It continues to win over your mind until you make that conscious effort to retrain your brain. The negative effects of SOS are:

Inability to finish projects. When you get excited about a new project before your first one is complete, you may jump ship before you can see any meaningful results.

Poorly planning your ideas and directives. People with SOS tend to focus on the thrill of pursuing a given strategy, or making a specific change, rather than the strategy or change itself.

For example, they may love the idea of creating a new product and begin work on developing it but have no long-term game plan on how to follow through on that idea. This leads to poor results from an underdeveloped execution and unrealized potential.

Spending lots of cash. There are hundreds of technological tools for businesses that are impressive, effective and fun to use. Unfortunately, if you subscribe to all these services, or you jump from platform to platform, you’ll end up burning through so much cash that they become incredibly cost-inefficient. As a result, you’ll have less money available to invest in your business.

I’ve spent thousands of dollars chasing plenty of objects. Why? I was looking for something to give me the clarity I needed. I was able to correct this with a few simple steps in my habits and thought process.

Here’s what you can do to gain control of your mind:

Limit Your choices.

Marketers these days are savvy in their approach to presenting everything as an urgent “must-have”. Why do you need 10 books on productivity if you have 1-2 of the best books? Do you need 3 different subscriptions to software when one does everything you want/require?

Getting lost in the weeds, we forget to focus on the fruits of our garden. SOS is watering the weeds and not the crops that matter.

Distraction isn’t the external issue. You don’t control distraction by controlling all the things fighting for your attention. You simply focus on the one thing that needs your attention NOW. Limit your choice preference and choose.

Distraction is a focus issue and not a result of having too many things to pursue. If you have ten rabbits running around in your field, you decide on the one to pursue.

I bought into the Shiny Object Syndrome for years. I would buy this and that, try this service and that one. I was convinced that if I just bought the next perfect service, I could eventually stop pursuing everything.

Then a new one would crop up.

The challenge with SOS is that you are always looking for the next better option. And there is always a better option than the one you just bought.

Before you click that buy button, talk about it with someone at home or on your team. Do you need this tool, training course or service? If so, map out the benefits it provides to your life and business.

Chances are, given time to consider, you'll realize you don't actually need it. Not only that but, in a few weeks, you'll see another similar product or service that almost does the same thing, but it actually is better and cheaper.

Don't believe them when they say, "You have ten minutes to grab this at 30% off." It's a marketing tactic, and it works. But if you dial into the same service or product next week, guess what, you'll hear the same story.

Compare the products on offer. When I shop on Amazon, I compare prices to this and that. After comparing prices, I can usually find it for cheaper. Impulsive shopping could cost you hundreds or thousands of dollars a year.

Work on one thing at a time. If you are immersed in one project now, you don't need something else that is out of alignment with what you are presently focused on. I know what it's like to be ambitious and biting off more than I can chew.

Finish your project and, if you decide later this "shiny thing" is the best tool or option, grab it. Chances are, by the time you have completed your one thing, you will have forgotten all about it.

Review your goals. Check your goals for the month and the quarter. If you don't have your goals written down, check out my book, Empower Your Big Goals, and work on this. Reviewing your goals will bring everything into alignment. If the shiny object isn't related to what you're working on right now, leave it alone.

This is where many people fail. “But I can get it now and use it later!” You probably won’t use it later, and anyway, won’t it be available in three months when you need it? Probably. It can wait, and so can you.

The bottom line is, Shiny Object Syndrome leads to distraction procrastination. It deepens your procrastination habit, and we want to unwind it, not strengthen it. Once you recognize this condition, you can correct it. I didn’t realize I had SOS until I looked at all the stuff I’d bought and the courses I signed up for. Once I woke up to my SOS, it changed everything.

Before I begin the chase, I do this:

Stop. Don’t do anything.

Think about it.

Argue the pros and cons with someone you trust.

STay as you are for 24 hours

RevIsit the decision/discussion in 48 hours.

Complete what I’m doing first.

I call this the STATIC method. When you find yourself overwhelmed with too many choices, or confusion is making it difficult to concentrate, remember the STATIC steps and slow it down.

Don’t make any impulsive decisions. Stop and think it through. If you feel rushed or you experience a rush from buying into something you’re not 100% on, do nothing. Wait. Breathe. Take your time. Massive action doesn’t mean jumping at everything you see.

You’ll be able to serve your business and sanity by giving up pursuing those shiny objects. In forty-eight hours, you could feel completely different and glad you had taken the time to reflect.

Less is always more. You want the most efficient and cost-effective tools and services, not a massive abundance of various tools all doing the similar function.

Implementation Task:

Now that you know what SOS is and how to manage the syndrome, build awareness into the temptation to pursue it. Use the STATIC strategy.

Sit on ideas before launching them. Before you begin work on the new project that’s going to “change everything,” take a moment. Wait until tomorrow. Delay the impulse to buy or start something new.

Finish building your bridge. There is a saying about half-built bridges. You can’t reach the other side. This is true for your goals and workflow.

Imagine a company that builds products, and instead of finishing one and launching it, they start building a new product. Nothing gets completed, and that company goes bankrupt. Finish what you’re doing. Work on one thing at a time. Complete the project before moving to the next.

Reduce your research time. Stop looking for new things. If you have the information you need, why get more? If you have the course or book or manual to do your work, do you need more? Probably not. Shiny objects give us a sense of euphoria in getting something new. It's like buying a new car. And after a few weeks you're looking to trade it in for a better model. Stick with what you have.

"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."

— Anais Nin

Step 19: Create Future Commitment Devices

"Begin to free yourself at once by doing all that is possible with the means you have, and as you proceed in this spirit the way will open for you to do more."

— Robert Collier

Psychologists have coined the phrase "commitment device" to describe an action or choice you make in the present to achieve a result in the future. Procrastination is such an elusive and cunning behavior of the mind that, we need to prepare ourselves ahead of the behavior we want to overthrow.

Remember earlier we discussed the future and present self, and that the future self prefers long-term plans, but present self wants immediate gratification. In order to succeed, you must build a fortress around your habits that matter, and protect your behavior at all costs.

How does a commitment device help us achieve long term future goals and end procrastination? By eliminating the path of least resistance. Procrastination is always at risk of taking over when choices have to be made. If you eliminate the necessity of decision making and automate your habits ahead of time, you can predict a positive outcome long term.

The goal is to reduce the odds of procrastination occurring by "locking in future behavior," as James Clear states in his bestselling book Atomic Habits.

For example, I had to stop flipping my phone on and checking Facebook. My solution: I deleted the app. When I wanted to save money, I set up an automatic plan to take 15% from my paycheck every month.

When I had to stop playing video games so I could get more writing done and stay focused, I sold my video games and the PlayStation. It was hard, but it worked. If I hadn't, I'd be great at Call of Duty, but still stuck in my job and be dreaming of writing books.

The historically famous Chinese Military General Han Xin is well remembered for his warfare tactics that won his armies victory in many battles. He would position the men with their backs to the river, so they had no choice but to attack the enemy head on. When Hernán Cortés arrived in the New World, he burned his ships in the harbor as his men were pushed to take the island… or die.

Now, that is a commitment device.

Now, you might not be burning ships or taking charge of an army, but you have to take charge of your life. The most direct and effective method is to start easily and build up to it.

It comes down to this: How badly do you want to change, and what can you do today to reduce the chances of decision fatigue and procrastinations tomorrow. The day will come when you don't want to put aside money for your retirement because you'd rather take a vacation. Or sitting on the couch watching television for the seventh night in a row is more appealing than starting that jogging routine.

The challenge comes from starting the habit. Most resistance we encounter is always in the beginning, the “getting going” of the process. We make plans to begin someday, but every day becomes a someday that never happens until a commitment is made to go all in, to win.

How can you win over procrastination and reduce your craving for instant gratification?

The solution is to start small. Reduce the size of the action so that it’s less overwhelming. In fact, your routine should be so easy you encounter no resistance at all.

Here are a few examples:

Read a book for five minutes

Do five pushups

Jog for 100 meters down to the end of the street.

Write out a sentence in the first paragraph of your book

It has never failed that all my days of procrastination and delaying taking action can be traced back to one event: the beginning. Starting the habit. Moving on that first step.

It was never doing the work that I struggled with, but starting it. I wasted more time and energy putting things off than actually doing them. There are tasks I delayed for years and carried that guilt inside of me. When I sat down

to get it done, I could accomplish it in a couple of hours, or stretch the task out over a few days.

It doesn't matter how much you get done, but whether you actually do it. It's better to stretch for five minutes a day for thirty days, then for thirty minutes once a month. When I work with authors writing their first book and they struggle with the writing process, my advice is always the same. Commit to 100 words a day for the first week. Take it up to 200 words the next week. Build up to 1000 words a day if that is your goal.

You win the war against procrastination by taking things in stride. Burning ships makes for a great story but, if you want to get aggressive with stopping certain behaviors, you can remove the impulse triggers from your environment.

This begins with setting up your intentions. You can't just talk about doing it someday. Do it today, but make it so easy that you get a quick win under your belt right away.

By creating small, intentional commitments now, this leads to big wins in the future. It's about writing down the time and action you intend to follow through with, and then showing up to do it.

This strategy created big wins for me over time, but for years I struggled due to lack of commitment. I had the desire to grow and succeed, but until I committed to an action at a certain time of day and could show up to deliver, very little happened.

It's about building momentum. Start at the top with a small snowball, roll it down the hill, and watch as it gets bigger and builds momentum on its way down.

Let’s get the ball rolling.

Implementation Strategy:

Write down one thing that you have always wanted to do but struggled to really get going.

Is it an exercise routine?

Writing a book?

Investing money for a retirement fund so you can live in Bali?

Decluttering your home?

Now, the goal is to reduce the size of the action to make it so easy to start the habit it becomes an easy decision.

Now, using the “5-minute time block”, you can lock in your commitment to getting this done.

Commit to the process.

Take your first step.

Just get started.

Breathe…and begin.

“Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.”

— Mark Twain

Step 20: Program Your Environment with Motivational Visual Triggers

"We May Encounter Many Defeats but We Must Not Be Defeated."

— Maya Angelou

You can reduce and render procrastination powerless by setting up positive visual cues within your environment. Many of our habits are triggered by the prompts we see, hear and touch. These are your environmental triggers, and they can either support your growth and progress (positive trigger) or diminish it (negative trigger).

A positive trigger would fill your fridge with veggies and fruit instead of junk food. When you're hungry and you open it, you can reach for a banana instead of a chocolate eclair. A negative trigger would be the opposite, and filling your fridge with junk instead of the good stuff.

For example, did you know on average most people check their phones over 400 times per day? This is a massive distraction. A visual cue prompts you to take action, so if your phone is a negative trigger to check social media, email or FB messenger, you will be prompted to respond to this when your phone vibrates or pings.

Here is an idea for implementation that I learned from Ed Mylett. If you're going to check your phone, set it up with the right triggers. Install your goals

on your screen so when you open your phone by habitual default, the first thing you see is your goals.

Many of our choices and habits feed into procrastination. Here is another example. For the first year I worked at home, the television was in my workspace. Now, I don't need anyone to tell me that is a bad idea, but that's a bad idea. When I became restless and bored and needed a distraction, what did I do?

Turn on the TV.

I would think, "I'll just take a break and see if anything new has been added to Netflix since I checked it ten minutes ago. Nope, not yet. This became a repetitive negative behavior. Anything that is distracting you from doing the important work is a negative trigger: Binging entertainment apps, eating junk food, or engaging in a negative conversation.

My solution: I tried unplugging the TV so it was harder to turn on. I would hide the remote. It all failed. My urge to be distracted and procrastinate was powerful. So, I did the only thing I could: I got rid of the TV. Gone. I walked it up to the 2nd hand store and sold it for $100.

Since then, productivity and focus are better than ever. I still find ways to procrastinate, but if you identify the trigger, that is the key to removing it. In most cases, it could be a tweak to your notifications, or removing an app altogether.

The key is to fill your environment with as many visual cues as possible. Tack your goals to your workspace wall. Write down positivity quotes. Keep your schedule on your desk and in sight at all times. Get serious about defeating procrastination instead of being defeated by it.

You want to WIN. And you will. Visual cues are critical to winning over procrastination.

Visual Cues and Motivation

When you surround yourself with positive triggers, it stimulates your mind to take intentional action. You don't have to remember to take action now because your environment is reminding you to do it. I'm less likely to watch TV if it isn't within easy access. Or check Facebook on my phone for the fiftieth time this morning if the app is removed and blocked from my phone.

Do whatever it takes!

You must be willing to do whatever it takes to beat the inner procrastinator. You are smarter than the lazy demon living in your mind. Think of visual cues in your environment as weapons against procrastination. With every positive trigger you install, you increase confidence and fortify your strength against the enemy of distraction.

The truth is in your progress. Track what you're doing on your calendar. Block it into your scheduler. Set up notifications to remind you that today is the day you committed to getting "that thing" done.

Take control of your environment and you control the outcome of the day. Give in to your monkey mind as it pulls you here and there and you lose momentum and confidence.

I make sure to have only three priorities a day. No long lists. I work on one thing at a time and it's always blocked in my calendar. If it's difficult to start, I give it five minutes. I know if I can start it, I can take it the distance.

The takeaway is this: Do the one thing that makes all the difference in your day, your week, and your business. Do the most important thing each day first thing in the morning. Get it done in the first hour.

Start with this:

Scan your environment once a day to identify negative triggers creating procrastination

Scan your digital content several times a day to delete or move files causing procrastination and distraction.

Use Motivational Nudges

Motivational nudges are small modifications that you can make to your environment in order to get your work done in the amount of time you have allocated to it. This is a powerful strategy for focus.

If your goal is to take a trip around the world (or to Disneyland), consider putting a picture of your dream trip on your desktop. Print out this picture and stick it on the wall. This will give you a motivational boost when you need to start working.

When I start writing a new book, I always have the cover created first. I post it everywhere within my focused environment so when I show up to write, I know what my target is. When the urge to procrastinate creeps in, it’s the cover that keeps things moving. This is my small motivational nudge.

Implementation Task:

Walk into your environment and scan it for anything that is distracting you. This includes your workspace and digital space, too. Start with your workspace. Throw away or pack up the clutter. Is there anything laying round just taking up space?

Clutter is defeating. If it’s an item you never touch, it doesn’t have to be in view.

Do this once a day, in the morning, before you start working and you become immersed in your environment. At the beginning of each day, I stand back and scan my environment for books, loose papers, notes, and anything that takes my attention away. Something I missed yesterday suddenly jumps out at me and I remember it had pulled my attention away.

Make this a five-minute habit every morning.

Next, set aside ten minutes a day to review your digital environment. There is a chapter at the end of this book that walks you through the steps for decluttering your digital environment.

This is most likely going to create more distraction than your physical environment. When I cleared away the files and organized things better, it saved hours per week of valuable time I would normally have wasted looking for misplaced files and documents.

What is your motivational trigger? Figure out what it is and get it in front of your vision. When your mind is tempted to drift off course, let its attention be captured by your dreams and goals.

“Forget about the consequences of failure. Failure is only a temporary change in direction to set you straight

for your next success.”

— Denis Waitley

Step 21: Reward Your Best Work

“The best possible way to prepare for tomorrow is to concentrate with all your intelligence, all your enthusiasm, on doing today's work superbly today. That is the only possible way you can prepare for the future.”

— Dale Carnegie

You must be good to yourself. This means rewarding yourself for taking intentional action and for having the courage to change your life for the better. It isn’t easy to overcome procrastination. Don’t be critical of yourself when you struggle.

Take time out and don’t overdo it. When you are overcoming one hurdle, treat yourself to something that is fun, relaxing, and brings joy into your day. This will raise your energy levels to prepare you for the next challenge.

For example, I schedule a massage once a week, and take regular trips to the park. Other reward activities include watching movies or planning a trip with the family. Just being productive and working all the time leads to burnout and fatigue. You will appreciate your success when you train your mind and body to a reward, especially after you have reached an important milestone or accomplished a goal.

Here’s a case in point. When I wrote and published my first book, I planned a trip to Universal Studios with my family. It was a significant reward, and I worked hard to make it happen. Now, you might not be writing a book but,

whatever your goal is, do something to celebrate when you reach it. Enjoy the time and it will make your work something to look forward to.

Here are ten ideas to reward yourself after accomplishing a hard task:

Attend a sporting event with friends or family.

Spend a movie night watching 2-3 of your favorite films.

Take in a sumptuous meal at one of your favorite restaurants.

Treat yourself to a one-hour body/foot massage.

Invest a few hours in a hobby you have not worked on in a long time.

Set up a chair on your porch and enjoy a drink (of anything) as you reflect on your future and all the great things coming your way.

Hire someone to clean your house in the afternoon.

Buy a book you've always wanted to read—Kindle, Audiobook or Paperback. Spend 1-2 hours reading.

Try something you have always wanted to do: scuba diving, horseback riding or mountain trekking.

Take a day off and go for a long bike ride.

This list is for reference only. You can decide the rewards that best serve you. The level of the reward is up to you. You can spend time doing something and it costs you nothing, or you could buy something that's been on your wish list for ages. What matters is the positive emotional experience you receive by putting in the work and then celebrating afterwards.

When you crave that dopamine hit after putting in hard work and successfully accomplishing a task, or putting in the hour you committed to, give yourself a reward. Whatever makes you feel good. This motivates your brain to try it again. Your reward gives you a dopamine hit that signals your brain saying, "I want more of this. What do I have to do to get it?"

Implementation Task:

Small wins matter. Rack up small wins every week and reward your victories. If you wait for the day when you hit that big milestone, you might give up before you reach it. Rewarding yourself along the way also shortens the distance to the reward.

For a complete resource on over 150 ways to reward yourself, check out this article https://www.developgoodhabits.com/reward-yourself/ at Develop Good Habits, by habit expert S.J. Scott.

'Hard-working' is what gets the job done. You just see that year after year. The students who thrive are not necessarily the ones who come in with the perfect scores. It's the ones who love what they're doing and go at it vigorously.

— Dr. Carol S. Dweck, author of

Mindset: Changing the Way You Think to Fulfill Your Potential

Step 22: Employ the Premack Principle (and Temptation Bundling)

"Often we are caught in a mental trap of seeing enormously successful people and thinking they are where they are because they have some special gift. Yet a closer look shows that the greatest gift that extraordinarily successful people have over the average person is their ability to get themselves to take action.

— Anthony Robbins, bestselling author of Awaken the Giant Within

In the previous chapter, we discussed ideas for rewarding yourself for putting in the hard work. But what about those days when you don't feel like it?

We both know there are many of those "I don't want to do it now" days. No matter how many ways you try to force yourself to do it, when willpower is on the defense and your task avoidance systems are triggered, it's going to be really hard to get any kind of undesirable task done.

This—of course—leads to reinforcing your procrastination behavior.

There is a principle that I have employed over the past few years to reinforce the behavior of doing things I don't really want to do.

This is known as the Premack principle, based on the research and study of David Premack, a principle that emerged from the study of Cebus monkeys.

The Premack principle suggests that if you want to perform a certain activity, you will perform a less desirable activity to get at the activity you really want; that is to say, the activity itself becomes the reinforcer. For instance, even if you don't want to clean the garage (and who really does), you'll do it if it means enjoying your favorite drink afterwards.

It's rewarding an activity you prefer not to do with an activity you want to do.

The principle states that "more probable behaviors will reinforce fewer probable behaviors."

Here are a few examples:

"If you cut the grass, you'll get to eat the whole lemon pie."

Parents and teachers use this strategy every day to motivate kids to take action. But adults need this, too! The longer you have been practicing task avoidance means you are conditioned to a certain behavior response.

Taking action is easier when you have the energy and mojo to just do it. It's hard to motivate yourself when it's the end of the day and you must get that report done. Or you haven't worked out all week and your body is pulling you towards the gym, but the mind is resisting and would rather watch a movie.

This leads into temptation bundling: reinforcing the behavior of taking action when you are resisting to do certain activities with the promise that

you can do the activity you really want.

Temptation bundling (Coined by Katherine Milkman, assistant professor at Wharton University of Penn) is the act of taking two activities and combining them together at the same time.

But the hitch is one activity you should be doing, but have a strong tendency to procrastinate on (folding laundry). The other activity is one you enjoy doing, but probably isn't the most productive use of your time (listening to your favorite Harry Potter book on audio)

Here are seven examples of temptation bundling:

Listening to your favorite audiobook while walking the dog or working out

Taking a walk in the park while talking with your business client on the phone

Cleaning up your inbox while listening to an online training course.

Watching Netflix while folding or ironing your clothes.

This approach feeds your need to do things that are important, but not immediately critical. Temptation bundling is powerful as it seeks to eliminate instant gratification. The strategy is derived from the idea that, by doing what needs to be done first, you will be able to do the thing you desire to do.

This can work extremely well to end procrastination, boost willpower, and condition your habits to take immediate action that breaks your resistance to

doing hard things.

The key idea here is that temptation bundling lets you enjoy the short-term benefits and instant gratification from doing your fun stuff, whilst building good habits along the way. By combining something you enjoy doing with something you know you should do—but usually avoid or delay—you'd make it easier to take intentional action on habits with long-term benefits.

Implementation Task:

By implementing the Premack principle and Katherine Milkman's Temptation Bundling Principle, you can get more done in the same amount of time without feeling guilty or rushed for time.

Here are 3 ideas to combine your own activities and get the most out of your day.

Work through your taxes while listening to your favorite motivational speaker on YouTube.

Playing a movie in the background while filling out an application form, or writing a report. (Note: This depends on the level of concentration needed as your inner procrastinator might favor the movie and stop everything else altogether.)

If you want to spend more time with your family or friends, you could include the specific person you'd like to spend more time with in an activity you both enjoy. For example, if you both enjoy playing the same game or eating at the same restaurant.

Implementation Task:

Creating Personal Temptation Bundles

Here is what you do. Take a piece of paper and draw a line down the center. You now have two columns. On the left side, make a list of activities, tasks or chores you should do, but regularly brush off as "later" or "someday-maybe-never" activities. This might include housework (all housework-related chores), office-related work (reports), menial tasks (email) or hard work (exercising).

Over on the right side, make your list of activities you love to do and make you feel like you're cheating hard work when you do them. Examples include: Eating those $7 Frappuccino's at Starbucks, watching Netflix or sports, listening to audiobooks/courses, or playing golf in the afternoon.

Now, take a look at both columns and link up what you should be doing with what you want to do. Now you have a set of activities that is building better habits and helping you achieve your goals.

"It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all–in which case, you fail by default."

— JK Rowling, The Harry Potter Series

We need to think about what we're really procrastinating on, because everyone is procrastinating on something in life. Consider thinking harder on the goals and dreams you're really procrastinating on, before you run out of time.

— Hal Urban, bestselling author of Choices That Change Lives: 15 Ways to Find More Purpose, Meaning, and Joy

Part III: Breaking Negative Behavior

I know I gave you a ton of valuable content in this book already. But I also know how elusive procrastination is. One minute you're committed to getting something done, and three minutes later find yourself working on another thing completely unrelated. When we can change our behavior, we change our habits. And when we change our habits, everything begins to shift.

The procrastination habit is a form of negative conditioning when it gets to the stage that it's affecting your health, finances and mental state. For many people, it's all of these areas…and more.

In this bonus section, we will look at three areas to help you curb the habit and get a foothold on changing your procrastinating behavior. When in doubt, refer to the steps in Part II, and take action. Always be working towards improving your life.

Breaking Your Negative Conditioning

Breaking Anxiety and Overwhelm

Breaking Your Limiting Self-Talk

Breaking Your Negative Conditioning

"If you believe you can accomplish everything by "cramming" at the eleventh hour, by all means, don't lift a finger now. But you may think twice about beginning to build your ark once it has already started raining."

– Max Brooks

If we break it down, avoiding tackling the hard things is a deep form of negative conditioning. It didn't start out this way, but like any addiction, we begin the habit to escape. It feels good for a while, until eventually, the effect wears off. We have to take more of the drug (avoidance) to achieve the same effect we had last week.

Procrastination is a negative addiction, and it is a deceptive enemy. It approaches you as a friend, but later, turns against you. Like the evil clown in Stephen King's story, IT, the habit draws you in with a "cute balloon" but eats you whole when you get closer.

It promises escape from doing uncomfortable tasks but builds you a prison where you must live and suffer. It's the voice in your head that says, "Come with me and I'll show you how to have fun while we put off this hard stuff. You don't need that, anyway."

I would tell myself, "But I work better under pressure!"

It actually isn’t true, but I had to come up with an excuse to make myself feel better for waiting until the last moment.

I have seen this habit drive people mad. No matter how much damage it created, they couldn’t stop the behavior. Until they accepted it.

If you are not familiar with the twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, the first step applies to any situation that is out of control:

“Admit I am powerless over hard things, and that my life has become unmanageable.”

The key word here is “unmanageable”.

As a chronic procrastinator, I had to get very real with the condition. The excuses I would make eventually lost power.

Putting off tasks is a negative learned behavior that has been reinforced through years of practice.

Like a habit.

You and I were not born this way. It’s not a medical condition.

We are avoiding what is uncomfortable because of:

Fear of failure.

Fear of success.

Fear of hard work? I doubt it. Most likely the first two options. If you were lazy, you wouldn't be reading this book.

If you avoid doing hard things, it is because you are conditioned to respond negatively to tasks that cause you discomfort. I still can't kick my daily habit of eating chocolate, and it's an effort to track daily expenses. Why? One task is fun, and the other isn't, but the task that I labeled as boring is definitely the more important.

When you attach difficulty to the task, your brain puts on the brakes. It begins looking for the easy win, the quick fix, or the easiest path that delivers a dopamine rush. Doing something fun that I get to choose is the best course of action.

Here lies the dilemma. The hard work that we avoid could be the path towards our greatest success in life, but we will never know until we do it. You can't predict what choices will bring about the best results. Many of us choose tasks that are easy to succeed at because there is almost a "no fail" opportunity. You've done this before, you know what to expect, and taking the easy, fun and predictable path is better than the unknown—until we hit a roadblock.

There are three steps you can take right now to move forward. I recommend you commit to these steps and, when you stumble, shrug it off and move forward again. We get caught up in our attempts to make things perfect, to do it right without fail, and to avoid having to face that failure.

Here are the three steps:

1) Make a Decision… in the Present Moment.

This is your commitment. Make this promise to yourself, to the universe, or to a friend. But decide that from this moment, when you hit a wall, you will stop to think about the first immediate step you can take. Decision making is a powerful moment. When you decide, “This is it, this is what I’m doing!”, it clears the path for everything else.

If there is a decision you are sitting on for fear of getting it wrong, decide something. It can be anything, but waiting for the perfect moment leads to prolonged avoidance. Nothing gets done and you lose momentum.

2) Sit in Silence.

One fear we all have is the moment of silence, when nothing is going on around us. The world is a quiet place. We are surrounded by darkness and 97% of it is silence! I want you to imagine that for a moment, and when you experience stress or the weight of so many things to do and you don’t know where to begin, return to your silent place. The world can be a distraction and so can everything in it—when we allow it to be.

3) Identify Repetitive Negative Thoughts.

Make a list of the negative beliefs you are teaching your mind. You can discover what they are from the previous exercise by becoming still and listening to your thoughts, which are spinning and telling you horror stories of what to expect. Like a horror scene stuck in continuous replay, your thoughts continue to tell you tragic stories of what will happen if you do this. Imagine running these thoughts through your mind a hundred times a day.

It sounds ludicrous but actually, research has revealed that we tell ourselves the same negative thoughts over a thousand times a week. Identify the negative thoughts stuck on replay. Write them down in your journal, then refuse to believe in the lies anymore. Look at your list and say out loud, “I’m done with you! Get out of my head!” Tear up the paper and throw it away.

I use a visualization process for this, too. I imagine taking the paper and throwing it into a black hole in the universe. You can visualize burning it (not recommended at home).

Unraveling your negative conditioning will go a long way to replacing those negative thoughts and beliefs that stick to your mind like glue. You don’t need them. You only need the truth, and that is, you’re a super warrior with amazing powers who completes the hard work.

Everything else that tells you you’re lazy, a fake, you don’t have what it takes… you can identify as a false movie playing out a situation in your mind and call it out. Bring it out of your mind and burn it.

This doesn’t have to be complicated, and you don’t need any fancy rituals or to read the right kinds of books.

Make it intentional. Make your mission amazing.

You are here to change things once and for all.

Breaking Anxiety and Overwhelm

Overwhelm is the feeling of intense pressure taking over your thoughts, mind and emotions. It is the feeling that you're drowning and, no matter how hard you fight, the shore appears farther away the more you struggle.

To illustrate, here is an example a friend of mine used:

"When I'm completely overwhelmed with too much to do, or if I've been putting off an important project because of the work involved, it's like I'm at the base of a mountain looking up at the peak. I start to climb, but for every ten feet I move forward, the peak gets further away instead of closer. I feel like I'm going nowhere, even though I'm moving. It's very self-defeating."

The self-defeating habit of delaying critical tasks creates anxiety. The longer you procrastinate and delay, the heavier the burden becomes. If you put off one task, the next day you put off another, and another. By the end of the month, you could have a mountain of work and unfinished projects that need attention.

Overwhelm is a paralyzing condition you create. It can result from poor planning and lack of execution. In many cases, it is postponing something until the last minute. Instead of chipping away at things gradually, we wait until the last moment, pushing everything to the brink of a deadline, and make a mad sprint for the end when there is no more time.

The result is upset customers, employees anxious about when they will get paid, or your family asking repeatedly, "Have you done this yet?"

The result of overwhelm looks like this:

Overwhelm and pressure can make you critically ill. It can isolate and give you heartache. If you have this negative habit, you know the feeling.

“The more you delay, the more you pay,” I always say.

It’s time for you to stop paying a heavy price for procrastinating. To overcome overwhelm, here are six strategies to help you keep track of your tasks:

(1) Focus on one task at a time. Multi-tasking is a dangerous activity. It kills productivity and throws heaps of stress and pressure on your brain to get it all done—now. But you can’t. The more tasks you try to do in a single hour, the weaker your brain power becomes. I was a habitual multi-tasker for years. I would have 20 different tabs open on my computer, and when I became bored or needed a dopamine rush, I’d flip through all the tabs, checking email, reading posts, responding to chat messages.

One hour would pass and I’d have nothing done. Gradually, as my priority projects would pile higher, I increased multi-tasking to feel good about doing something and feeling busy.

To overcome this, I changed my multi-tasking mindset. I decided things didn’t need to be all done right away, and it couldn’t all be done now. Unless you have three brains and six arms, you should work on one thing, but it must be your highest priority.

(2) Focus on your #1 priority right now.

When you’re overwhelmed with what could happen in several minutes or later this week, you can’t appreciate the here and now. Your priorities—the hard things you have been delaying—are now and not in the future. Determine what is your #1 thing today, and block in one hour to work on it.

If you’re thinking is focused on what the future holds—whether in a few minutes or several years down the road—it may make you more susceptible to becoming overwhelmed. To help remove the possibility of uncontrollable thoughts that may or may not come about, think about one moment, task, and experience at a time in the present moment.

What is your #1 priority for today? What is your most important work now? What is the difficult/tough thing you can do in the next ten minutes that pushes your goals forward?

(3) Practice Deep Breathing Meditation.

Seriously. This is a game changer. I started this last year and spend 15-20 minutes a day doing deep breathing energy meditation. I promise it will change your life.

Use the Box Breathing technique from Mark Divine.

Mark Divine, author of the bestselling book Unbeatable Mind, teaches an effective breathing practice I use daily. It is called the Box Breathing Technique. It works like this:

1. Start by exhaling all the air from the lungs.

2. Now inhale to a count of five, and then hold your breath to a count of five. Don’t clamp down and create back-pressure with this hold, just stop the

inhale but continue the upward rise of the chest.

3. After the retention, exhale the air slowly to a count of five, and then suspend and hold the exhaled breath for a count of five.

4. Add a powerful mantra on each hold, such as, “I’m winning, I’m getting better at this, and I’m improving every day.”

When you consciously breathe in deep, it triggers your body’s relaxation response, which can come in handy during particularly stressful moments.

(4) Shift Your Self-Defeating Thoughts.

Procrastination always begins with your thoughts. When you think, “I’ll never get this done” or “I have too much to do, it’s hopeless,” you’re setting yourself up for failure. Self-defeating thoughts build overwhelm and will turn your head into a mushroom cloud within minutes. Your thoughts are your own, which means you can create thoughts that empower you instead of destroying you.

The aim is to reinforce your thoughts with positive anecdotes and supporting words. Begin by replacing your negative thoughts with empowering ones. Substitute your default belief that you’re no good with a belief that empowers you.

Do not accept any thought that builds on your doubt and fear. Instead of “I am no good” say, “I am great.” Substitute “My life sucks,” with “I am grateful to have everything that I do.” You can make a list of your gratitude and refer to the list when doing this activity.

Substitute your self-defeating thoughts with alternatives:

“I may not get it all finished today, but if I work on it or if I seek help, I will probably get it done.”

“I know I’m feeling overwhelmed right now, but if I take a break, I may feel differently about this when I return.”

“It seems overwhelming to me right now, but if I break it down into smaller parts, it may be more doable.”

(5) Write it Down.

Every time I feel overwhelmed, I write down the task or activity that makes me feel this way. Overwhelm is the first trigger that sets you up for avoidance. You don’t want to feel overwhelmed; you want to feel good!

Overwhelming thoughts and associated negative feelings create fear, anxiety and from there, you become mentally frozen from doing anything.

Here is a solution. Write down and acknowledge the thing that is creating this negativity. I’ll illustrate:

I’ve been an information hoarder for years. I love downloading things and then throwing them into Dropbox, or a folder on my desktop.

If you spend hours a day on your computer (like I do, and 90% of the people I know) and your files are in total chaos, it’s like sitting in a room filled with garbage.

At the end of this book, I include a section on cleaning your digital wasteland. But to use this as an example, I would become overwhelmed by all the PDFs, audio files, and Word Documents. When overwhelm hit, I would panic and start file dipping (searching through stuff) until I found what I wanted.

By that time my mind was drained. Exhaustion occurs when we are overwhelmed, and this could be anything causing you stress.

Whatever it is, write it down as soon as the overwhelm hits you. Stop what you are doing. You have just found something that needs to be acted on. Not now, but later. By noting it, you have admitted this is a problem. By admitting and seeing it now, you are free to take intentional action to deal with it later. And you will.

Breaking Your Limiting Self-Talk

"One of the most tragic things I know about human nature is that all of us tend to put off living. We are all dreaming of some magical rose garden over the horizon—instead of enjoying the roses blooming outside our windows today."

— Dale Carnegie, How to Win Friends and Influence People

Self-talk is your inner voice. It's switched on 24/7. While you may not focus on your inner dialogue with intention, you've rehearsed self-talk throughout your entire life. It's your mind's running commentary playing on autopilot in the background. It influences and creates how you see yourself and the world around you.

Internal negative self-talk is damaging. It can lead to a self-defeating cycle of procrastination that lasts for decades. What we tell ourselves internally is expressed in the external world as it becomes our reality.

If you think you're helpless to defeat your procrastination habit, you will act like it, talk like it, and then it becomes a part of your internal programming.

Does this sound familiar:

"I'm such a procrastinator."

“I’ve always put things off until the last minute. It’s just who I am.”

“I lack time management skills.”

“Why do I always leave things to the last minute? I’m such a loser!”

Self-talk is powerful because it forms your reality. It solidifies our beliefs and is the architect constructing your mind. So, it’s critical that you monitor your self-talk.

I have seen people literally transform everything through this one practice. It isn’t easy, but as you chip away at the negative criticisms you hurl at yourself, you experience positive bursts of energy throughout the day. But you must be diligent with reprogramming your self-talk.

The reason we cannot take control of life is that we fail to take control of ourselves. This begins with breaking down the negative messages that are trapped inside your head.

Here are a few examples of how you can do this:

“I’m such a procrastinator.”

You are not your procrastination. Put an end to identifying yourself as a procrastinator. When you use language that emotionally attaches you to your habit, it only defeats you. You will always be that guy in the boat hanging on for life, waiting for the next wave to come in. Catch yourself when you say these words:

“I put things off because it’s who I am.”

Identity has everything to do with beating your habit. As soon as you say, “I’m a procrastinator,” you will own this belief. Reinforcement of this idea is keeping you trapped. You are surrendering your power with every defeat. You are making a choice to act this way.

Think about this for a moment. By living in the moment, you get to choose who you want to be. Your future self does not exist tomorrow or next year. Your future is now as you make choices in the moment. What you do now determines the tracks you create later. When you say, “I’ll do it later,” you are committing to suffering later, and not now.

“I lack the proper time management skills.”

Fortunately, time management is a learned skill. Nobody is born with excellent time management skills. It is a skill that improves with awareness and consistent practice. The only thing you lack is the commitment to improve this skill, and commitment is a definitive decision.

Make this your #1 skill to improve this year. Read a few books on the subject or take a course. Trust me, I have studied many of these resources and we are not lacking the material for learning about time management. This is a common excuse many people use, but it’s an escape route. Don’t let yourself get away with it.

One book I recommend for mastering time management is How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life by Alan Lakein.

Replace Your Negative Self-Talk with Empowering Words of Confidence.

Your self-talk is convincing. It has been operating in the back of the room like a silent intruder that has broken into your home without you realizing it. It feeds you lies and false beliefs that are built into your subconscious and streaming from the past.

This is not what you are, it's what you do, and because it's a behavior and not a condition you're born with, it can (and will) be changed. You have been identifying your negative self as the entity that lives inside you and, like the face sucking creature in the movie Alien, it has attached itself to your identity.

If you break the cycle, you stop living as a person who avoids doing things. Instead, you become an action taker. Your intentional action becomes a positive energy in your life.

Kill your identity as a procrastinator. In its place, you will implement a string of confident language. This is to be your personal "love language." Have you ever loved someone so much that you had the urge to tell them every day? Your partner, parents, children, or best friends? Now it's time to tell yourself the same thing.

To remove the negative discussion in your mind setting you up for sabotage, here are the self-love phrases I use:

You have been feeding into the negative self-talk habit day after day, hour after hour. Like any habit, the more you feed it, the stronger it grows, until it becomes an unbreakable steel chain. But habits can be broken. It begins when you stop feeding into it.

Like any muscle, it atrophies when you don't exercise it. But this is one muscle we want to kill off. In its place, you will implement the intentional action habit. This is the habit of doing hard things first with intention. Just as

you used to delay tackling the hard things, now you will take intentional action to complete these tasks.

Your negative self-talk is self-defeating when you repeat the same messages again and again. This is intentional brain washing. You feel powerless against your mind as it feeds into the procrastination habit. But remember this:

There is nobody else around. It's all you!

Here is how you can channel empowering self-talk into a daily action habit:

Be aware of the language you are creating in your own mind. Monitor your internal conversation. Write down the thoughts you have.

Your self-talk is a string of language you have been telling yourself over and over and over again. You've performed this repetition to the point that negative self-talk becomes your mind. You literally begin to believe over time, "This is who I am."

Be still for fifteen minutes in the morning. Begin your day by reprogramming your internal software. Listen to the surrounding silence. Bring yourself into the present moment. Stay there as long as you can. Feed your mind the ideas and thoughts you want to have. Shut down the self-talk set to autopilot.

Identify negative self-talk traps. Certain scenarios may increase your self-doubt and lead to more negative self-talk. Work events, for example, may be particularly hard. Pinpointing when you experience

the most negative self-talk can help you expect, prepare, and act to overcome them.

Surround yourself with positive people. Whether you notice it, you will adapt to the outlook and emotions of the people around you. This includes negative and positive outlook and emotions, so surround yourself with positive people whenever you can.

We don’t always get to choose the people we share an office with or live within our own homes, but we can choose the way we react to people’s negative behavior.

Your conversation circles could influence negative self-talk. Since we adopt the mindset of people surrounding us, this is a common trap for many people working in company culture.

Identify the traps you are currently caught in. Is it a relationship? Corporate culture? Low self-esteem? It is difficult to identify your lack of confidence as a negative self-talk trap, but if you deal with depression, negative thoughts or trauma, your self-talk is created from the mind and it lives in survival mode.

In this case, I recommend you find a person (or professional) to talk with. You will find it easier to discover the excuses and negative emotions that lead you into internal traps.

Monitor Self-Defeating Excuses. As we discussed previously, procrastination begins with internal reasoning. You have many excuses for not doing this thing today. What excuses do you frequently use?

Excuses build your belief system. You tell yourself the same excuse hundreds of times per day, strengthening the justification for putting off hard tasks.

Create a system of regular "Check ins" with your feelings. During events or bad days, stop and evaluate your self-talk. Is it becoming negative? What thoughts do you have right now? You can set a timer to go off or lock it into your Google Calendar. Meditation throughout the day, even for brief, 5-minute sessions, can connect you consciously with your emotions.

Create a list of Positive Self-Talk Quotes. The key to mastering your mind is taking control of the dialogue feeding into it. One strategy that works is keeping a list of positive language nearby. Think of this as your new script for reprogramming your mind.

The habit of Doing Hard Things First begins with the emotions we are creating. When you don't "feel like doing something", it's time to check your inner dialogue. Chances are, you're creating an excuse and telling yourself, "This doesn't have to be done now" or "I don't feel like it because…".

Create a list of positive quotes. You can find a list of these in my Empower Your Thoughts Personal Workbook. Run a quick Google search and you'll discover hundreds of positive quotes. Begin with a list of your favorite three. Add one a day to your list. This is to be your new inner dialogue.

Here is a list of quotes you can start with:

"Our subconscious minds have no sense of humor, play no jokes and cannot tell the difference between reality and an imagined thought or image. What

we continually think about eventually will manifest in our lives.” — Sidney Madwed

“Remember, happiness doesn't depend upon who you are or what you have; it depends solely upon what you think.” — Dale Carnegie

“The game of life is the game of boomerangs. Our thoughts, deeds and words return to us eventually, with astounding accuracy.”

— Florence Shinn

“The person who sends out positive thoughts activates the world around him positively and draws back to himself positive results.”

— Norman Vincent Peale

“No matter where you go or what you do, you live your entire life within the confines of your head.” — Terry Josephson

“You and I are not what we eat; we are what we think.”

— Walter Anderson

“Life has many ways of testing a person’s will, either by having nothing happen at all or by having everything happen all at once.”

— Paulo Coelho

“With everything that has happened to you, you can either feel sorry for yourself or treat what has happened as a gift. Everything is either an opportunity to grow or an obstacle to keep you from growing. You get to choose.” — Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

You have powers you never dreamed of. You can do things you never thought you could do. There are no limitations in what you can do except the limitations of your own mind.

— Darwin P. Kingsley

Part IV: Do Hard Things Everyday

Now that you have a strategic formula for taking purposeful action, let’s dive into some deeper strategies for additional backup.

In this last section, I have included a bonus of five areas in life that most people delay doing hard things. Take your time to build out some wins in one area before moving into the next one. You could be strong in one area (finances), but weak in another area (personal relationships).

Within six months, you will have made significant progress in one of these areas, and possibly several depending how much effort and focus you can put into this.

Do Hard Things for Your Health

"Keeping your body healthy expresses gratitude to the whole cosmos- the trees, the clouds, everything."

– Thich Nhat Hanh, bestselling author of Fearless

Is there an exercise program you have been meaning to start? Is there a diet plan you've been wanting to try?

If you've tried to diet or make other healthy changes in the past and failed, what were the biggest roadblocks that stopped you from meeting your goals? How can you overcome each one so that this time is different?

What do you think the biggest roadblocks to starting an exercise program will be? How can you address each one so that you can fit more exercise into your day?

Some of the lifestyle changes you need to make (eating better, joining a gym, attending frequent medical appointments) can become costly. What else in your life are you willing to cut back on so that you can make room in your budget for these important additional expenses?

Managing a new health condition can feel stressful at times, but you can still enjoy the busy, fulfilling life you had before. How will you make sure you fit "me time" into your schedule each week to help you relax and de-stress?

What other ways will you continue to enjoy your family, friends, and hobbies?

Do you express yourself freely and appropriately, or do you keep most of your worries and frustrations inside?

Are you creating too much pressure for yourself because you've over-extended your commitment, have too many deadlines, or believe that "there's never enough time?"

Do you take a few minutes every morning to plan your day?

Do you set goals? Are they realistic, both short-and long-term, and do you have what you need in place to help you achieve them?

Do you make time each day to exercise, eat right, manage stress and nurture your relationships?

Do you take time before sleep to evaluate how your day went and reflect upon what you could have done to be more positive, loving and constructive?

Do you wake up grateful to be alive for another day, and are you in the habit of recognizing and expressing thanks for all you have to be grateful for?

Are you content with what you have, or are you always striving for more in order to feel secure?

If you do not get what you want, what is the price you pay in your health because of anger, depression, lost hope and feelings of insecurity?

Do you see the positive side of events, even when they appear unfavorable?

Are you able to perceive life challenges, obstacles and “accidents” as new opportunities to grow and to learn?

Do you empower others by telling them what you appreciate about them?

Do you take time to reflect upon and relive the beautiful moments in your life—the moments of success and joy?

Do you operate from a win-win mindset where both you and others can be happy and satisfied with your achievements, or do you prefer to win whether it is at another’s expense?

What would you like to change in your life? Do you really believe it is possible?

My Health Plan: Ten Questions to Ask Yourself

What do I want my healthy life to look like?

A strong, fit, healthy, and confident person able to enjoy all I wish to pursue.

Why is my health important to me?

So, I can live a life of quality and enjoy my friends and family.

What is my health plan?

Eat healthy foods daily, exercise daily, drink plenty of water and have fun doing it.

What habits sabotage my health plan?

Late night eating! My solution is to turn off the lights in the kitchen at night and eat plenty of nutritious food during the day.

What are my health strengths and weakness?

I am consistent and feel my best when I exercise and eat healthily. Weaknesses include late night eating and binge eating.

This last question is perhaps one of the easiest ways to realize what you are eating and why you are eating it.

What will this food do for my health?

This is the question I ask myself before every meal! Everything we eat creates a hormonal response in our bodies and that response is ultimately under our control!

Take notes and write everything down in your journal. You can answer the questions that apply to you and save the rest for another day. But even if you only start crossing off a couple items on this list, you will have started the hard things you were putting off yesterday. This program gets you to take determined action. You can do this!

As you complete all the things that you have been putting off where your health is concerned, you will start to feel better, act better, and look better.

Do Hard Things Around

Your Home

"In a moment of decision, the best thing you can do is the right thing to do, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst thing you

can do is nothing."

— Theodore Roosevelt

Is there a hole in the wall of your living room that you've never fixed? Are there any areas of your home that are falling apart and you need to call someone to fix it? Is your spouse complaining that the washing machine is still broken?

I'm not a house repair person. If something breaks, I call someone. If I can't call someone, it doesn't get done. I'll throw a poster over the hole in the wall or pretend the broken door handle is totally okay.

Broken things around home—or even if you need to fix stuff up—reduces the motivation in your home. If you're in the habit of putting things off, the longer it stays undone, the heavier it weighs in on your motivation and confidence.

To combat this, I grabbed a writing pad and a pen. Yes, still my favorite tools —but use an iPad if you prefer. I blocked off five minutes and started in the

kitchen with things that could be improved. It took me twenty minutes, but I soon had a decluttering list for three rooms in the house.

My list looked like this:

Next to each item, I marked it as either “Self”, meaning I could do this, or “Hire”, or calling a pro to do this. These things are not hard to do, but if you have to block off half a day to fix a hole, you might want to call someone who can do this in twenty minutes, even though it will cost you a few dollars.

I went through the rest of the house and made a list of forty-seven things to improve, fix, or de-clutter.

I encourage you to take an hour to do this process. One of my greatest mental defeats is ignoring the things that are screaming for attention. It drains my mental energy and leaves me anxious, scattered and depleted of motivation. Your goal is to eliminate everything and anything in your life, causing you discomfort.

Chances are, there are many things that you have turned a blind eye to and just accept it as normal. You tell yourself, “Oh, I can live with that.” Then you repeat the process again, and again. Soon you’re using this excuse for everything, which is how you reduce your quality of life—by accepting the lowest common denominator. When you decide to do nothing about it, you’re still making a decision.

You’re deciding to prolong your pain!

This is true regardless of whether it is things around home, your finances, or a business project. If you ignore broken things in one area of your life, it will

eventually spill over into everything else.

Here are some of the hard things to do you might find around your house:

Improve the lighting in your living room.

Replace the broken handle on the cabinets in your kitchen.

Upgrade your shower nozzle.

Wash the windows so you can see out of them.

Install remote control lights.

Place Alexa in your home to help with basic home control of lighting, music, etc.

Install the security system your family has been asking for.

Declutter the garage and sell the “junk” online.

Paint the bedroom.

Replace the worn-out wallpaper.

Upgrade your fixtures.

Get new outlet and light switch plates.

Make upgrades to your landscaping.

Update your window frames.

A friend of mine spent several months repairing and upgrading all the rooms in the house. When they sold it, the upgrades had increased the value by $17,000.

He said, “I made a list of everything around the house that needed to be done. I then made it my mission to fix one thing per day. Some things took several days, but we worked on the upgrades for three months. It began with the list and realizing all the stuff that had been neglected.”

Do the Hard Things Around Your Workspace

"If you don't pay appropriate attention to what has your attention, it will take more of your attention than it deserves."

— David Allen, bestselling author of

Getting Things Done

Is there a project at work you have been avoiding? Is your desk a mess and files disorganized? Do you suffer from information overload on your computer desktop?

Take thirty minutes to walk around your workspace and make notes of everything that requires your attention. Leave nothing out, no matter how small it is. Write the tasks down on sticky notes and tack these up on your wall.

Next, tackle one task per day. Only one. This eliminates overwhelm (read previous chapter), and as you hack away at the list, you begin to feel less anxious and more confident. Your workspace is the best place for hard things to show up.

Here are eleven ways you can break the mold of doing hard things at work. This could be work you're doing in your own business, or an office job for a

large corporation. If you work for yourself, it's common to get stuck even more often. If you're the only one who shows up to work every day, even the easy things can seem like obstacles.

Here is how I break the mold on hard things at work. By doing so, it improves my personal lifestyle. Yes, they are intertwined. Satisfaction in one area feeds into another. But how can you do the hard things at work so everything you do spills over into satisfaction in other areas as well?

We can pull steps from our ten-step system in the previous section and integrate them with our hard things at work.

Here are three strategies you can implement:

1) Identify the reason behind your resistance. There is a reason that hard things trip us up. They are hard and we don't want to do them. So, the mind looks for something better, more entertaining, juicier, as an escape from reality that keeps us avoiding the hard things we need to. But resistance is persistent.

Start with the easiest thing on your hard things list. It could be a project you're putting off starting it because of all the steps involved. What I do is a make a list of all the steps. Break everything down into the smallest steps possible. You don't know the details of how you'll do the task, just what it is.

2) Delegate the work you struggle with. You don't know everything, and one area that leads to resistance is a lack in skill that the work requires. This is why we hire accountants to do our taxes. This is why we outsource to graphic designers to create a logo for our business.

This is the reason why I hire someone to run marketing in my company. If it were all up to me, it would never get done. This isn't a laziness issue, but it leads to overwhelm when you try to learn skills that are not in line with your strengths.

3) Focus on your strengths and not your weaknesses. As we have discussed earlier, weaknesses take time to develop into strengths. It could take years, but your strength can be improved in a matter of days if the foundation is already there. Balance your strengths with the strengths of others and you have a collaborative team.

Do the Hard Things in Your Digital Space

Why do you put off doing the hard thing when it comes to decluttering your digital environment?

It's easy to ignore your digital content. Nowadays, with millions more people taking to online services and business through digital platforms, it's easy to get lost in the shuffle and overwhelm of digital content.

This is one area I ignored for years. And as we learned earlier, ignoring your tasks leads to disaster. If you spend time online and use your computer and files for business, establishing a clean, organized virtual space is essential. You will avoid burnout and brain fatigue.

If you're like most people and are spending hours a day on the computer, downloading and storing files, PDFs, videos and pictures is a normal habit that you give little thought to.

Over the years, your digital landscape can turn into a disorganized digital wasteland. You know you should organize this better, creating separate

folders for your personal content, but you have so much stuff in Google Drive, Dropbox, Evernote and your Desktop, the task has become daunting.

This leads to overwhelm, and when you're overwhelmed, what do you do? Put things off for a later date.

If you refer back to the steps covered in the Do the Hard Things Formula, you only start doing something when you commit to it. But before you do, make your decision and ask yourself:

"Is this area of my life unmanageable?" and

"If I fixed it, how would this impact on my quality of living?"

Chances are, you'll feel great knowing you are taking charge of your digital mess. By doing this, it frees up your computer and storage capacity, but the biggest advantage is, it frees up your mind.

My digital wasteland was costing me ages every week. I spent hours each month just searching for stuff. My files were a total mess and remained that way, and until I dedicated time to cleaning it up, I was clueless to what I had.

The advantages of Doing the Hard Things by decluttering your digital space are that it:

(1). Improves Your Focus and Productivity. These two benefits go together. You become distracted by all the junk in your folders. In your folders it gets worse when you have multiple files. I've seen people with as many as 500 files in one folder!

When you have files upon files and data to scroll through to find what you want, it's like swimming in a sea of confusion. You have no room to maneuver. You open files randomly, which leads to multi-tasking.

When you try to decide whether you need this or that, the energy needed to decide drains your mental power. By cleaning up your digital waste, you are reducing the chances of multi-tasking and inviting overwhelm into your life.

(2). Speeds up your computer. Saving everything on your desktop slows down your computer. This reduces the life of your computer, and these devices aren't cheap. You also have to clean your computer more often, which eats into your productivity time.

(3). Reduces capacity issues and saves money and time. Clutter takes up massive storage space which you probably have to spend more money on to increase capacity. And the more capacity you have, the more you add to it.

(4). It increases confidence. Like most things you put off in life, by tackling this massive dinosaur, you feel great by taking purposeful action towards completing such an overwhelming project. As your time and energy increases, so does your confidence and this leads into greater productivity habits. It's all a win-win!

(5). You Discover Old Files. Imagine if you came across a book you wrote years ago but lost in your digital wasteland? This happened to a friend of mine. She had spent months writing a dissertation she thought had been lost.

She found it months later, buried in her digital oasis, when she finally got around to cleaning it up. It had been saved under a different name, so all her

searches found nothing. This saved her weeks of time. Nowadays, she backs everything up in one location to make sure nothing goes missing.

Continue to ask yourself questions about your junk.

Here is my simple system for decluttering my digital files, and creating a system that reduces overwhelm, saves time, and brings energy and confidence into your life:

Decide on one location for all your files and content. This can be Google Docs, Dropbox or an external Hard Drive. I use an EHD for backing things up, but for fast access, I recommend a digital space. I personally like Google Drive as you can work both online and offline. Dropbox is my second choice for larger files such as music, pictures, or video.

Block off decluttering time. Refer to step four in the process. What gets scheduled gets done. You can start with five minutes on the clock.

Create 3 separate folders:

Personal

Work/Business

Other

Depending on the file, it will be stored in one of these folders, with multiple sub-folders to break it down. We won't cover the system in this book, but you can work out the best system for you. You can refer to Steve and Barrie's 10-Minute Digital Declutter: The Simple Habit to Eliminate

Technology Overload, if you need to dive in for a detailed process. Keep it simple!

Here is a list of questions to ask yourself as you work through the process of doing the hard things for decluttering your digital files:

Do the Hard Things in Your

Personal Relationships

"Disconnect from everything long enough to see if it feeds your soul or if it's a distraction. What's deeply connected will always remain."

– Maryam Hasnaa

Do you need to have a tough conversation with someone but you're putting it off? Are you considering ending a relationship? Is your partner avoiding you and so you fear this could be it, but you're afraid to ask, "What's wrong?" Are you losing touch with your children and need to have one of those "parent talks"?

I've been there many times. I avoided asking questions and would distance myself instead to avoid the conversation.

But eventually, the thing that gets pushed aside jumps in front of you again. As we have learned in this book, there is no escape from reality. You can't avoid change. Relationships are the hardest obstacles to navigate.

When (not if, but when) you find yourself avoiding problems in a relationship, here are seven action tasks for you to implement. If possible, you and your partner can work together on these action items.

For challenging or difficult topics, it's best to plan the conversation in advance:

“I’d like to talk with you about...” or “We really need to talk about...”

Then, agree on a time and a place for the conversation. Decide to meet in a place with comfortable space for all participants to see each other clearly.

Negative emotions such as frustration, anger and contempt can build into deeper resentments. This splits relationships apart and makes communication more difficult. The fear of ending these relationships intensifies if you avoid taking direct action.

This approach will vary depending on your relationship. In your household, you might agree to meet in the living room or on neutral ground. A friend of mine would set up a family meeting spot once a week where members would gather on Sunday for 30 minutes to openly discuss everything. He said this is one reason his family bonds have lasted, and as a result, his children feel more connected.

Barriers to Communication

One core reason we avoid communicating is that we have barriers to navigate.

Here is a list of barriers that could influence your behavior to avoid difficulty in relationships. Identifying the barriers will be a significant advantage to you and your friends, family or people in your organization.

Check off the barriers that are holding you back:

Fear is the primary culprit behind our avoidance tactics, and so it crops up again and again within relationships. We fear the outcome that taking intentional action will bring.

When you sense your mind looking for an escape, ask yourself, “What is the potential outcome if this situation is avoided?” Ask this question over and over until you access the truth. Eventually you will arrive at the reason you’re avoiding the task. The same is true if its relationship based or related to finance or a personal project.

You can reduce the amount of anxiety, fear and sensitivity before a discussion by taking the time to plan the details.

Here are nine strategic points to set your relationship discussions up for success. By creating a pre-action plan and building a foundation for support and understanding, your relationships will grow and mature.

Even if the outcome is not what you hope for, you are still winning if you do everything possible to make it successful.

(1). Make sure you understand what the other person has said before you respond. If you’re not sure what he or she said or meant, ask for clarification. “Could you please repeat that?” or, “I’m not sure what you mean. Can you please help me better understand?”

(2). Approach the conversation with openness and an interest in problem solving, rather than needing to be “right”.

Anytime we see a discussion as a competition where we need to be “right”, it means the other person has to be “wrong”. This kind of rigid either-or,

win-lose, or right-wrong mindset makes conflict much more likely and mutual understanding much less likely.

(3). Keep to the topic at hand. Focus on the topic of this conversation. Bringing up issues or complaints related to other topics or past events always interferes with healthy communication during the current conversation. Save those other issues for another time. If they continue to be important to you, you'll remember them.

(4). Take responsibility for feeling the way you do, rather than blaming the other person. No one can make you feel a specific way. Use "I" statements—as in, "I feel..." Be clear and specific about what the other person did that contributed to your reaction. Rather than saying a general, "You make me so mad," focus on the other person's actual behaviors.

(5). No interrupting. When the other person is speaking, consciously listen to what he or she has to say with your full attention. This differs from waiting for the other person to finish speaking so you can respond. If you're thinking about what you're going to say while he or she is still speaking, you're not listening.

(6). Drop your assumptions. Just because you have been living or working together for a period of time doesn't mean you know what the other person is feeling or thinking. People grow and change. What you want, need, or expect from each other changes and may need to be renegotiated from time to time.

(7). Pay attention to the pace of the conversation. In heated dialogue, things tend to move quickly and a lot of the work is about slowing down. The more you can find ways to naturally pause and deactivate, the easier it will be to stay clear, hear one another, and respond wisely.

Reflecting before you respond naturally downshifts the pace of a conversation.

(8). Genuinely try to understand. This will show up in your body language, your tone of voice, and other nonverbal communication that supports an atmosphere of goodwill and collaboration. When appropriate, state your intention explicitly: "I'd really like to understand where you're coming from…" or "I'm committed to figuring this out in a way that works for both of us." Such statements can shift the entire tone of a conversation.

(9). Focus on what matters and keep your attention flexible. Instead of belaboring the story of "what happened", listen for what matters to both of you. If you're hearing demands, internally translate them into requests and respond in a way that honors the other person's needs.

If the situation is complex, consider breaking it down into multiple conversations on different days. Your initial pass might just focus on empathy, trying to listen and hear the other person. Next time, share your side and endeavor to build mutual understanding.

Do Hard Things for

Your Finances

"I never attempt to make money on the stock market. I buy on the assumption that they could close the market the next day and not

reopen it for ten years."

— Warren Buffett

One of the biggest areas of weakness for many people with taking intentional action and doing the right thing is with finances. Taking care of your money so it takes care of you is the dream for many. Unfortunately, many people fail to take the time to create a system for saving, investing and building a stable financial platform.

In this section I'll walk you through the basics of doing hard things for your finances, but for an in-depth dive into how to really make this work, I recommend these four books:

MONEY Master the Game: 7 Simple Steps to Financial Freedom, by Tony Robbins

The 4-Hour Workweek, by Tim Ferriss

Think and Grow Rich, by Napoleon Hill

The Science of Getting Rich, by Wallace D. Wattles

You don’t have to be a financial guru or a banker to take control of your financial destiny. You only have to decide to stop procrastinating and simply do something about it. You can get advanced later if you want to, by diving into blockchain investments and other sources of investment.

Here are four things I do consistently every month that keep my finances on track. I’m not offering financial advice here, just a set of habits to get you started on doing hard things for your future cash flow.

1) Track Your Monthly Numbers

It’s hard work but, the consistency of tracking your monthly numbers will pay huge dividends in the future. Knowing where you spend cash means you can cut expenses and save more. In what areas are you wasting money? What subscriptions can you cancel?

I use Buxfer to control spending, set budgets and plan for future financial goals.

Another alternative is to write everything down in an expense tracking journal, but it takes more work to calculate the numbers if you fall behind.

(2) Pay Yourself First (Always!)

The first rule to saving money I learned over 30 years ago was to put aside 10% of my paycheck every two weeks. No matter what. Pay yourself first before paying the bills. You put yourself first before the electric bill, your credit card, or even the mortgage. Nowadays many companies make this

effortless for people to pay themselves first by having the money deducted automatically from their salary.

If you're a business owner or entrepreneur, you will have to be more disciplined to do this, but you can still automate it. Every month, a certain amount goes into savings no matter what. If you can only save 10%, that is good. If you can save only 5%, that is still better than being in debt. The significance is in building the habit over the long term.

(3) Start up a side business (Airbnb/Amazon FBA/Virtual Coaching

I have a friend who has set up two Airbnb locations in the past 3 years. He now brings in an additional $5-10k a month. And he has more to come. Yet he still works full time while monitoring the business a few hours a day. He hires someone to come in and clean the place in between stays. I know other people making money with Amazon FBA, online courses, or book publishing. You can set up most of these businesses with some money needed for start-up, depending what it is. But planning for the future means doing everything possible to maximize your monthly income.

You can keep this simple to start with. My investment portfolio is easy because this is what I do.

(4) Explore additional income streams. You don't have to be an entrepreneur to build extra revenue into your income pipeline. These days, there are so many ways to make an additional income that it makes sense to take advantage of everything you can. Imagine if you can bring in just $300 a month extra?

You probably have a full-time job and if you are really busy with work and family, set aside one hour a week to work on a side hustle. Always look for ways to expand.

Obviously, a small section on money isn’t enough to cover everything, but at the very least, I hope that you get started doing something. That is the purpose to this entire book—to get you doing the things you’ve always resisted!

If we are paying attention to our lives, we'll recognize those defining moments. The challenge for so many of us is that we are so deep into daily distractions and 'being busy, busy' that we miss out on those moments and opportunities that – if jumped on – would get our careers and personal lives to a whole new level of wow.

— Robin S. Sharma, bestselling author of The 5am Club

Conclusion

Final Thoughts on

Doing the Hard Things First

"How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to

improve the world."

— Anne Frank, The Diary of a Young Girl

You now have a complete system for breaking through any form of procrastination and getting your work done. Those tasks that you abandoned long ago or continue to avoid can now be zeroed in on and handled with grace. But the journey doesn't end here…

To be successful, you must go back through this material and put the strategies into practice until they become a habit. Repetition builds consistency, and this forms habits that bring you everything you've ever wanted. Developing the habit of taking hard action becomes easier with consistent effort.

You will always have to deal with fear. Everyone has fears to confront, from company CEOs, to frontline bank employees, to billionaire entrepreneurs. What always makes the difference is how you handle the fear. When you resist against doing difficult tasks, ask yourself, "If not today, when will I commit to doing this? If not now, then when?"

Keep Pushing Forward

Change only happens when you are committed to making it happen.

Make it a routine habit to revisit this material and practice the steps to conquering the procrastination habit.

Don’t let procrastination win. You are totally responsible for turning things around, and it begins with showing up with intention every day to be the best version of yourself.

As you may have heard:

Success isn’t final, and failure isn’t fatal.

You will have good days and days when you feel like a failure.

But as I always tell people, the only failures in this world are people who give in and give up. You can fail one thousand times over and you’re still a winner in my book. Earn your small wins and rack up confidence points. Confidence comes with taking action, always.

As Tom Bilyeu once said, in one of his lessons taught through his show Impact Theory:

> “The only guarantee in life is that it will be hard. Success is never guaranteed, but that you will go through hard times to get there is.”

Embrace the hard times. Push through resistance. Beat your lazy mind and train it to do as you say. You are in command of your own mind—it isn't commanding you.

Make it your personal mission to become the absolute best version of yourself. Visualize who this person is in the future and direct every action towards becoming that person of greatness.

Your victory is in the struggle. Your commitment to becoming better than you were yesterday is the path towards the winner's circle.

You are earning a seat at the table of greatness by showing up to play hard and work hard.

If I get there first, I'll save a seat for you.

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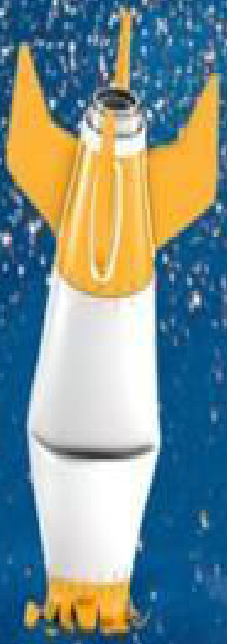

FAIL YOUR WAY TO SUCCESS AND BREAK ALL THE RULES TO GET THERE

SCOTT ALLAN
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *UNDEFEATED*

About Scott Allan

Scott Allan is an international bestselling author of 15+ books in the area of personal growth and self-development. He is the author of Fail Big, Empower Your Thoughts and Rejection Free.

As a former corporate business trainer in Japan, and Transformational Success Strategist, he has invested over 10,000 hours of practice and research into the areas of confidence development and mindset mastery training.

With an unrelenting passion for teaching, building critical life skills, and inspiring people around the world to take charge of their lives, Scott Allan is committed to a path of constant and never-ending self-improvement.

Many of the success strategies and self-empowerment material that is reinventing lives around the world evolves from Scott Allan's 20 years of practice and teaching critical skills to corporate executives, individuals, and business owners.

You can connect with Scott at:

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